

Whatever it takes

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/29871615) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/29871615>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence
Categories:	M/M , F/M , Gen
Fandoms:	魔道祖师 - 墨香铜臭 Módào Zǔshī - Mòxiāng Tóngxiù , 陈情令 The Untamed (TV)
Relationships:	Jiang Cheng Jiang Wanyin & Wei Ying Wei Wuxian , Lan Zhan Lan Wangji/Wei Ying Wei Wuxian , Jiang Cheng Jiang Wanyin & Jiang Yanli & Wei Ying Wei Wuxian , Jiang Cheng Jiang Wanyin/Wen Qing , Jiang Yanli & Wen Qing , Wei Ying Wei Wuxian & Wen Qing , Wèi Yīng Wèi Wúxiàn & Jin Guangyao , Wèi Yīng Wèi Wúxiàn & Jin Zixuān , Wèi Yīng Wèi Wúxiàn & everyone else , except for the assholes like jin Guangshan and Su She and Jin Zixun
Characters:	Jiang Cheng Jiang Wanyin , Lan Zhan Lan Wangji , Wen Qing (Modao Zushi), Wen Ning Wen Qionglin , Jiang Yanli , Lan Xichen , Wei Ying Wei Wuxian , Jin Zixuan , Luo "Mian Mian" Qingyang , Jin GuangYao , Nie Huaisang , Nie Mingjue , Mo Xuanyu , Other canon characters
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence , Time Travel Fix-It , Somebody Lives/Not Everyone Dies , yunmeng prides , POV Jiang Cheng , POV Wei WuXian , Wen Qing and Wen Ning live , Angst with a Happy Ending , Hurt/Comfort , Wei WuXian and Jiang Cheng actually communicate , Yunmeng Siblings fluff , But Also Some Angst , Lots of WangXian moments , Protective Jiāng Chéng Jiāng Wǎnyín , Protective Lán Zhàn Lán Wàngjī , Jin Guangshan and Jin Zixun will die for sure , Nie Mingjue Lives , Twin Prides of Yúnmèng Feels , Slow burn but not for Wangxian , Brotherhood , justice for the wen remnants , Jiang Yanli and Jin Zixuan Live , Wen Remnants Live (Modao Zushi) , Cinnamon Roll Wēn Níng Wēn Qiónglín , Wēn Qíng Lives and Wen Ning (Módào Zǔshī) , Canon-Typical Violence , Implied/Referenced Cannibalism , reference to wx's suicide , No beta we die like wx , Established Relationship , Torture
Language:	English
Collections:	THE UNTAMED Time Travel Fixit , Amaris' MDXS Good Af Fics , Mo Dao Zu Shi , China Fandom , AU / Time Travel Shit I LOVE , Wholesomeness en bandeja de plata
Stats:	Published: 2021-03-06 Completed: 2022-10-21 Words: 115,009 Chapters: 35/35

Whatever it takes

by [Moonlit_dewdrops](#)

Summary

Jiang Cheng and Wei WuXian are sent back to the past. This time, they can save everyone they love. They can make the right choices. They can learn to trust one another. However, everything comes with a price.

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Wei WuXian hadn't *meant* to do it. He hadn't meant to stumble upon a secret room at Unclean Realm while visiting Nie Huaisang. He hadn't meant to activate a mysterious array that Sect leader Nie had drawn out on the floor (Or had he?) He *did, however*, deliberately read the open book spread out on the floor near the array. *Time travel array*. Wei WuXian remembers reading. *Why was Nie Huaisang studying up on time travel arrays? Weren't those forbidden? Of course he had found it interesting, but he knew there would be consequences that came with these types of spells. He wouldn't...risk it...would he?*

But the deed had been done and now he found himself lying on a bed in a room. His body felt different, weaker. And his head hurt like crazy. He sits up and looks around his surroundings. His flute, ChenQing, is on the bedside table next to him along with a Qiankun pouch that gave off dark energy. *Had that been there when I came here? I don't remember bringing it.* He stands up and walks over to a water basin set down on the table and he freezes, staring at himself in the reflection of the water.

*I'm back in my old body...but **how** ?*

He tries to figure out what's going on all while his head continues to throb. Just then he hears her. The sweet sound of her voice still continued to echo in his dreams, even after over thirteen years.

"A-Xian, are you awake?"

Wei WuXian felt like his heart had stopped.

Shijie...?

~

Jiang Cheng didn't know what had happened. One minute he had been sitting at his desk and the next, he had a sharp burn in his core, so overwhelming that he felt himself double over and black out. Then he finds himself waking up in Unclean Realm. *Was Nie Huaisang responsible? Was he planning something again? And getting me involved?*

After Guanyin Temple, Jiang Cheng's wariness of the Nie sect leader had grown significantly and though they still interacted with one another due to sect affairs, it felt nothing like their youthful and burden-free days at Cloud Recesses. He didn't think it would ever be possible to feel like that again.

One reason was that they were both sect leaders now and the second reason was one they

never spoke of, though it had slipped out more than once. Wei WuXian had been in Yunmeng several times according to Jiang Cheng's spies but he never once ventured close to Lotus Pier nor did Jiang Cheng actively seek him out. He couldn't find the courage to. Even after everything they've been through, even after so many truths had been revealed. It wasn't easy. The lives that had been lost could not be revived.

Jiang Cheng takes a deep breath and stands up from the bed he had been sitting on.

"Young Master, the meeting will start soon." A Jiang disciple calls from outside his door.

"What meeting?" He asks, still confused.

"For the Sunshot Campaign, of course."

What...?

~

*On second thoughts...maybe I **did** activate that array.* Wei WuXian stares at the door, trying to calm himself down. *Am I imagining things? Did I really activate that array on purpose because I wanted so badly to fix everything despite knowing he couldn't? But with the power of that array..*

"A-Xian?" A knock follows her voice this time. Wei WuXian can't answer her. He finds his voice stuck in his throat. He stays quiet until he hears the sound of her footsteps walking away from the door. Then he sinks back into bed, sitting down slowly while gripping the side of it.

"*Fuck*," he says outloud. "What did I *do*?"

~

"Sect leader?" The Jiang disciple calls out for him again as Jiang Cheng tries to clear the thoughts whirling through his head.

What the hell just happened? I got sent back in time? Who would...

He pushes himself off the bed and stands up quickly. Ignoring the shaking in his wrists, he walks over to the door and pulls it open, startling the disciple to jump back from it.

"Where's Wei WuXian's room?" He asks, trying to keep his voice steady. The disciple blinks at him in confusion before telling him the location. Jiang Cheng stalks through the halls of Unclean Realm. He's aware of disciples staring at him as he walks, so he drops the thunderous look from his face. He stops in front of the door of the man he had once hated (or he had told himself he hated for the past thirteen years), the man he wanted to be his brother again yet at the same time he couldn't. The door opens before he even lifts his hand.

"Jiang Cheng?"

“Wei WuXian?”

Jiang Cheng stares. And Wei WuXian stares back.

Wei WuXian was back in his old body.

Something was definitely wrong.

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 2

“Uhh.” Wei WuXian stares, not knowing what else to say. He’s back in his own body which was already strange enough but now he’s staring at a much younger version of Jiang Cheng standing at the door. It takes him a few seconds to regain his composure, which results in him pulling Jiang Cheng forcefully into his room and sliding the door closed with a loud thud.

“What the hell-” Jiang Cheng begins angrily, but Wei WuXian presses a finger to his mouth to tell him to be quiet.

“What?” Jiang Cheng asks again, quieter this time.

“Do you know what’s going on?” Wei WuXian asks at last.

“I was going to ask *you* that. Wei WuXian, if this is another one of your tricks-,”

“It’s not!” Wei WuXian retorts. “I don’t know what happened either. I was visiting Nie Huaisang! Then there was a secret room and some weird array. I don’t know if I activated it by accident or what...but either way, I activated it and I ended up here.” He begins pacing the room. Why *had* it dragged Jiang Cheng here? There were no names written on that array...

“Why did it drag *me* here too? And how come you’re back in your old body?” Jiang Cheng demands. Wei WuXian pauses his pacing to stare at him.

“Maybe,” He begins hesitantly. “It has something to do with your core.”

“What?” Jiang Cheng’s voice comes out cold.

“My soul was in Mo Xuanyu’s body...but the soul is still connected to the core.” Wei WuXian continues.

“So...when you activated it...it brought me along to..wherever we are,” Jiang Cheng says slowly.

“I think we went back in time,” Wei WuXian says flatly. Jiang Cheng gives him a look of disbelief.

“Is that even possible?”

“Just *think* . You’re back in your teen years! And I’m back in my old body and...and,” Wei WuXian’s throat tightens. “I heard Shijie.” A look of grief, anger, and disbelief passes through Jiang Cheng’s face at the same time.

“You-,” He begins.

“A-Cheng, A-Xian, someone told me you were here. Is everything alright?” Wei WuXian tenses. It was really her. It hadn’t been a dream and judging from Jiang Cheng’s reaction, he could hear it too. He hadn’t been imagining things.

Jiang Cheng's face turns towards her voice coming from outside the door. Then Jiang Cheng turns back to Wei WuXian with a look that he could only describe as pure shock.

"Jiang Cheng, *wait* ," Wei WuXian grabs his brother's arm as he starts towards the door.

"Wait, *what* ?" Jiang Cheng snaps, trying to pull himself free but Wei WuXian tightens his grip.

"We need to *think* things through!" Wei WuXian hisses back. "We need to act normal...no I mean...we have to act like how we used to... or Shijie will think something is wrong. Don't you see what we can do?"

"What can we do?" Jiang Cheng's voice drops to a low whisper, desperate and vulnerable in a way that makes Wei WuXian wince.

"We can fix everything. Shijie..Jin Zixuan," Wei WuXian takes a deep breath before he continues. "Wen Qing...everyone, we can save them."

" *How* ?"

"We'll talk about it and plan it out. For now, let's go answer the door. Remember to act normal okay?" Wei WuXian locks his eyes with Jiang Cheng who holds his gaze for a long time before he nods.

"A-jie, you can come in," Jiang Cheng says. Wei WuXian still notes the tremor in his voice. The door opens and Wei WuXian finds himself overwhelmed too. His Shijie was as beautiful as he last remembered her. He finds tears springing to his eyes.

"A-Xian, is everything okay?" Shijie notices his face in an instance.

"A-jie...", Jiang Cheng says softly. He's holding back tears himself, unable to believe his eyes. Wei WuXian only stares back at her.

"What's wrong? Did you...did you two have a fight again?" She looks at them worriedly, but with so much love in her eyes. The same amount of love she had for him as Jiang Cheng holds her in his arms, bleeding from a gash on her back, and her hands reaching towards his face.

"No...it's nothing. I was just...really glad I was able to make it back here," Wei WuXian says quickly. " Jiang Cheng was just coming to wake me up for the war meeting. You know how I can never wake up early," He says, laughing as well. Shijie smiles at them fondly.

"I was looking for you as well, A-Cheng. But now that you're both here, why don't you head off to the war meeting? I still have the injured to tend to."

"Okay," Jiang Cheng finally says, his voice calmer now. "Let's go." He says, turning to Wei WuXian. They leave the room together.

"What are we going to do? How do we save everyone?" Jiang Cheng asks as they make their way towards the main hall.

“We focus on winning the war first,” Wei WuXian tells him. “We still need my amulet and my cultivation to win. But...before the war ends, we need to find them.”

“Find...who?” Jiang Cheng narrows his eyes.

“Wen Qing and Wen Ning,” Wei WuXian fixes Jiang Cheng a firm glare, one he seldom used on his younger sibling. “We *both* know how much we owe them. We know how much they did for us.”

“Wei WuXian, our goal is to save A-jie and her husband, is it not?” Jiang Cheng’s voice is tense, but not angry.

“Of course it is! But I’m not throwing away the chance to save Wen Qing and her people too.” Wei WuXian’s eyes flare up in determination. “We...I was unprepared last time...this time, I have a plan.”

“Then tell me. We’re trying to fix our mistakes, are we not? The first thing we can start doing is by *talking* to one another. Everything got messed up between us last time because of our lack of communication!” Jiang Cheng glares at him but Wei WuXian only nods.

“Okay...no secrets,” He agrees. “We have to work together. But you have to trust me, okay?”

Jiang Cheng’s stares back at him steadily.

“Then you have to trust me as well.”

They finally made it to the war meeting. Last time, Jiang Cheng was sure Wei WuXian had arrived late to this particular meeting or he had not been present.

Either way, things weren’t going different from what he remembered. Jiang Cheng can see Jin Zixun out of the corner of his eye and he immediately feels a burning hatred for the man. No matter how much he had blamed Wei WuXian back then for Jin Zixun’s death, he hadn’t forgotten the details about Jin Zixun ambushing Wei WuXian on the way to Jin Ling’s one-month celebration. Wei WuXian, Jiang Cheng notices, had made a point to stand as far away from the man as he could and was instead, standing close to Lan Wangji. Last time, the two of them had a major fallout and Lan Wangji seemed tense when having Wei WuXian standing so close to him.

The meeting continues on to the topic of the Yin iron and that’s when Wei WuXian speaks up, saying the same things he had last time about countering the Yin iron.

“One month,” He finishes, his hand lingering over the Qiankun pouch that Jiang Cheng now knows holds the Stygian Tiger amulet. Lan Wangji’s eyes linger over it as well.

“Young Master Wei, why do you not carry your sword?” Lan Xichen asks quietly. The question makes Jiang Cheng wince. Once he had also berated Wei WuXian for not carrying his sword, saying it was ill-mannered and improper.

Now, with the truth of the golden core burning inside his chest, he wondered how Wei WuXian had tolerated it back then. Maybe he hadn’t. Maybe he had hidden everything behind that bright smile of his. Wei WuXian always insisted everything was okay when it really wasn’t. Both Jiang Cheng and his sister knew something had been wrong back then, but he had kept avoiding them so they never had the chance to figure out why. And then a month later, he was gone and had left them for the Burial Mounds.

Not again...I won't let history repeat itself. I'll keep him by my side. I'll make sure I won't lose my family ever again.

“Wei Ying.” Wei WuXian turns at the sound of the voice. *My husband...but no..not in this timeline. Not now....*

“Lan Zhan...,” He says quietly, staring into the eyes of his lover. *How am I supposed to act? Like I'm not his husband? Like I don't feel my heartbeat speed up everytime I look at him and he looks at me...?*

“You didn’t leave with Jiang Wanyin.”

“I was waiting for you,” Wei WuXian replies and he sees the flicker of hope in Lan Wangji’s eyes. *Lan Zhan and I misunderstood each other back then. There were misunderstandings between us just like there were between me and Jiang Cheng...perhaps this is another thing I can fix.*

“I wanted to apologize...for what I said in Yiling.” The words come out surprisingly easy. Lan Wangji’s eyes seem to flicker in surprise as well.

“I know you want to help me,” Wei WuXian continues. “But I know what I’m doing. Don’t you trust me?”

“I will always trust Wei Ying.” Lan Wangji gazes back steadily at him.

“I need this..cultivation to win the war. It’s our best shot against Wen Ruohan and his puppets. It won’t be easy any other way.”

“This type of cultivation harms your body and your mind.” *I heard this far too many times .* Wei WuXian thinks, but he keeps himself calm, knowing Lan Zhan was only thinking the best for him.

“We need it to win the war,” Wei WuXian replies.

“How do you know that will guarantee our victory?”

“You just have to trust me...”

They stare at one another for a long time, Wei WuXian looking into those gold eyes that he loved so much. The ones he woke up to every morning in the Jingshi.

“Okay.” Lan Wangji nods

“Wei WuXian.” He turns at the sound to see Jiang Cheng looking at him with a serious expression on his face.

“We need to talk.”

“We do.” Wei WuXian nods. He bids Lan Wangji farewell and follows his brother to his room. He can still feel the other’s lingering gaze on his back.

“We’re planning on driving out the Wens from Yiling and any of the other cities they’ve taken over,” Jiang Cheng says once he had closed the door behind them.

“Yes, I know,” Wei WuXian replies, crossing his arms over his chest. “I was there during the war meet, what about it?”

“You can take a few disciples to go to Yiling and find Wen Qing.” Wei WuXian’s eyes widened in shock.

“What? Are you serious?” He stares at his brother with an incredulous look.

“Yes, I’m serious,” Jiang Cheng bites out, his voice still with hints of bitterness. “You said it yourself. We owe them. Last time, I was in no position to help them...I didn’t *know* how much they did or what we owed and...and then you just ran off to the Burial Mounds.” He shakes his head. Wei WuXian looks away.

“If we bring them here now, we can keep them here under the pretense that they’re our prisoners,” Jiang Cheng continues.

“We can’t treat them as prisoners or let anyone else treat them as such,” Wei WuXian counters immediately. “Wen Qing is a doctor. As a healer, she can *help* us...she can help with the wounded. We both know that her family is being threatened by Wen Ruohan just as much as the other sects are.”

“We’ll keep an eye on her. We’ll claim full responsibility for her and her family. We have to do that now before Jin Guangshan can even get the chance to imprison them in his camps.” Wei WuXian snorts at this.

“The Jins barely contributed last time. They shouldn’t have any right to keep the Wens on their own property,” Wei WuXian mutters.

“Concentrate!” Jiang Cheng says sharply. “Do you want to save them or not?”

“Of course I do!” Wei WuXian retorts. “I *know* the only way we can save everyone is if we cooperate with one another....but I know it isn’t easy for you to just pretend like everything is okay again....in another timeline we...” He breaks off, not knowing how to continue.

“We already agreed that it was in the past,” Jiang Cheng says quietly. “But don’t you see? We *can* make everything okay again. This isn’t just a dream. We really got sent back in time. Everyone...A-jie...Jin Zixuan, they’re *alive* right now.”

“I know,” Wei WuXian says softly. “It’s just...it’s hard for me to believe.”

“We can do it. We’ll save my sister, *our* sister and we can save any innocent lives that were lost before.”

“What about...Jin Guangyao? Are we going to do anything about him?” Wei WuXian and Jiang Cheng had both been there when Jin Guangyao’s schemes had been revealed.

“We still need him to kill Wen Ruohan,” Jiang Cheng says calmly. “But Su She...and Jin Zixun, we need to keep an eye on them as well.” His lips automatically curl with disgust at the mention of those names and Wei WuXian himself clenches his fist.

“Okay, I’ll go find Wen Qing first then.”

“Don’t even *think* about going alone.” Jiang Cheng glares at him. Wei WuXian only smiles and puts up both his hands in a gesture.

“Of course not. Wouldn’t dream of it.”

“I last saw Wen Qing in Qishan after I saved her from the dungeons. I don’t know where she went, but she wouldn’t wander far. Her family is still in danger and she told me they took Wen Ning away.” Wei WuXian tenses.

“They took him away? To punish her for helping us?”

Jiang Cheng nods grimly. However much he hated the Wens, the debt that he owed prevented him from hating Wen Qing or Wen Ning. He was sure the rest of her family was innocent was well, from what he remembered in the original timeline. He hated to think about what Wen Ruohan would do to a sweet and gentle boy such as Wen Ning.

“He would have been taken to Nightless City.” Wei WuXian’s tone grows thoughtful.

“If that’s true then...we will have to look for him *after* we defeat Wen Ruohan. Before the Jins find him.”

“Before Jin Zixun finds him,” Wei WuXian corrects, his fist clenching at the mention of the name.

“Yes. Anyways, I would look around Qishan or Yiling for her. I want to send as many men as possible with you, but you mustn’t seem intimidating either.”

“She trusts me,” Wei WuXian reassures her. “If I have to talk to her alone, I will do so.” The two men exchange looks and nod.

As he prepares to leave the gates, Wei WuXian isn’t surprised to see Lan Wangji walking hurriedly towards him.

“Wei Ying, where are you going? It’s not safe to go alone.”

“I’m not alone, Lan Zhan. Jiang Cheng sent at least a dozen disciples here to go with me. Look.” He gestures to the disciples waiting by the gates.

“Let me go with you.” Wei WuXian blinks up at him.

“Lan Zhan...you’re needed here in the camps. More than I am.” However much Wei WuXian wanted Lan Wangji to come with him, he needed to keep the fact that he was rescuing Wen Qing a secret from him for now as it was a Jiang sect affair. Wei WuXian knew how much Jiang Cheng hated when he tried getting involved with other sect affairs. There’d be a time when Wei WuXian would tell him of course, but for now, he couldn’t risk it.

“Wei Ying, why is Jiang Wanyin sending you to Yiling instead of keeping you here in the camps to help?” His voice is insistent and stubborn.

“I have a mission to do,” Wei WuXian replies. “We’re fighting a war. I can’t be kept from fighting Wen soldiers.”

“Master Wei, if you’re ready, we should head out soon.” A disciple hurries over dipping his head to the both of them.

“Let’s go.” Wei WuXian tears his gaze away from Lan Wangji and turns to leave but a firm hand grabs his arm.

“Let me come with you. *Please* .” Wei WuXian takes a deep breath, ready to pull his arm away.

“You told me to trust you...but you need to trust me too.”

“Lan Wangji.” Wei WuXian freezes as Jiang Cheng storms over. *Oh great.*

“If you wish to accompany my brother, you may do so. Have you told Zewu-jun?” Wei WuXian whips his head around to stare at his brother in shock.

“Jiang Cheng!” Wei WuXian protests.

“It would be better if you had more backup. Besides, you haven’t fully recovered yet.” He gives Wei WuXian a hard look who sighs and just nods. *This is surprising? I thought Jiang Cheng hated Lan Zhan, but I guess not anymore when we’re under different circumstances.*

“Well, then we can go.” Wei WuXian waves his hand and heads towards the disciple with Lan Wangji following close behind him.

Jiang Cheng waits for them to disappear from sight from the main watchtower before he goes to speak with Sect leader Nie and Sect leader Lan.

“Jiang Wanyin, is it true that you’ve sent Wei WuXian to Yiling?” Nie Mingjue hits him with the question as soon as he enters the main hall.

“And Wangji told me he would be accompanying him,” Lan Xichen adds. “Is there a reason you suddenly sent him there?”

“Yes,” Jiang Cheng replies steadily. “We’re looking for Wen Qing.” The two sect leaders look at him in surprise.

“You want to *find* a Wen?” Nie Mingjue asks gruffly. Jiang Cheng holds his gaze steady to him. In another timeline, he would not have been able to do so.

In the past, he had been too hesitant. He realized that now. It was understandable, of course, considering he had his entire sect wiped out and had to stay on the good side of the other sects while at the same time struggling to adjust to his new role as sect leader. *Jin Guangyao was right that day in Guanyin Temple...if I had just been brave enough to protect Wei WuXian from the other sects... No I shouldn't have had to choose between him and my sect...especially when he's my...br-*

He shakes away the thoughts and lifts up himself to make eye contact with Nie Mingjue.

“Wen Qing and Wen Ning helped my siblings and me escape from Wen Chao and his men. If not for them, we would have been killed as well. She risked her life protecting us.”

“Is that so?” Lan Xichen’s voice is gentle and reserved.

“Yes...I know Wen Ruohan kept her close to him...but that was only because he threatened her family. She never participated in the slaughters that have taken place. Her family are doctors and only save others, not kill them.”

“She is still a member of Qishan Wen. What do you plan on doing once you’ve found her?” Nie Mingjue’s voice isn’t angry but it is stern.

“Dafan Wens,” Jiang Cheng corrects him. “Her family is part of a branch from the Wen sect. They are not our enemies. We hope that by bringing her here, she will be able to provide us information in exchange for the protection of her family.” This surprises everyone in the room, including himself. He hadn’t planned that with Wei WuXian originally. It had just slipped out now.

“That...is a very interesting proposal, Sect leader Jiang.” Nie Mingjue looks thoughtful now.

“Very well..if she is willing to cooperate with us, we will go with your plan. But she must be watched at all times while she is here. She is not allowed to wander around alone. Not only for our safety but hers as well.”

“I will have my disciples watch her. Nothing will give you a reason not to trust her, I promise.” Jiang Chen reassures him, feeling a wave of relief rush over him that he had managed to convince them.

“I only hope that is true,” Nie Mingjue says gruffly while Lan Xichen gives him a reassuring nod. Jiang Cheng leaves to inform his sister of his plans.

“It is the right thing to do,” A-jie agrees almost instantly. “They saved our lives. They’ve proven themselves to be allies and risked their lives for us. It’s only right that we do something in return.”

“The Nies and Jins won’t like it,” Jiang Cheng says quietly. “There must be a way to keep them safe without making them angry.”

“I see no reason to be angry at them,” A-jie frowns. “Wen Qing is a doctor and she’s never harmed anyone. Will the sects really be so unfair?”

“I’m afraid so,” Jiang Cheng tells her, remembering how much hatred the sects had for anyone with the surname ‘Wen’ in the other timeline. He could see himself convincing the Nies and Lans that not all Wens were evil, but the Jins were going to be less reasonable. The only people he could think of that would believe him were Luo Qingyang and Jin Zixuan. Maybe even Madam Jin if he can get her on their side.

“We can find a way to reason with Zewu-jun and Chifeng-zun, but I believe Jin Guangshan won’t be willing to cooperate.” A-jie’s frown deepens. Jiang Cheng is sure she’s wondering why he thinks that way, but he’s surprised when she says,

“I see,” She says quietly. “If we can’t convince Jin Guangshan, then who do we talk to?”

“Jin Zixuan,” Jiang Cheng says immediately. “Or Madam Jin. Luo Qingyang can also be of help to us.”

“Where will we bring them? To Yunmeng perhaps?”

“If we get the other sects to agree for our sect to have custody over Wen Qing and her people, then yes, we should bring them to Yunmeng. Lotus Pier has plenty of spare rooms for them.” The words come out in a surprisingly confident manner. *I can do this. I can do this.* He tells himself repeatedly.

“We’ll do everything we can, right, A-Cheng?” His sister looks at him with those warm and kind eyes. He still can’t believe she is here, alive, right in front of him. His sister is *alive* and this time she can *stay* alive.

“Yes, A-jie, we will.”

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Wei Ying, did you forget your sword again?” Lan Wangji frowns down at Wei WuXian’s hands that only held ChenQing.

“No need for it,” Wei WuXian tells him, though he didn’t sound very convincing. “I don’t want to make myself seem like a threat to Wen Qing.”

“The Wen soldiers. We will bump into them on our way there.”

“I won’t have to worry when Lan Zhan is protecting me,” Wei WuXian smiles cheekily at Lan Wangji who only gives him a look. *Maybe I should just tell him the truth...or part of the truth?*

“Lan Zhan..., if I told you that I have no way of using the sword again...would you believe me?” Wei WuXian knows how he will react. He hears a sharp intake of breath and sees shocked eyes turning to look into his.

“Wei Ying...”

Wei WuXian stops walking and takes hold of Lan Wangji’s hands firmly.

“Feel it for yourself.” He moves Lan Wangji’s hands to his wrist. He can feel it trembling under his hand, that is also shaking.

“When?” The anguish in Lan Wangji’s voice hurts to hear, but Wei WuXian takes a deep breath.

“After Lotus Pier burned down,” Wei WuXian tells him. It wasn’t the entire truth, but it was all he was willing to say.

“Before you were in the Burial Mounds?”

Wei WuXian stiffened and didn't reply. *Why did Lan Zhan know about this? Was it because of what the Wen soldiers told them or did he **know** ?*

“So now you understand why I’ve turned to the demonic path. I don’t have a choice. You need me by your side for the war.” *We wouldn’t win otherwise.*

“Master Wei, there are soldiers ahead.” A disciple who had been patrolling ahead hurries towards him. They had just arrived at the borders between Yiling and Qishan.

“Wei Ying, take this.” Lan Wangji takes out a Qiankun pouch and takes a pair of bow and arrows out of it.

“Where...” Wei WuXian begins, then stops. Jiang Cheng must have given it to him. It wouldn’t be much use, considering he had no core, but using a bow required minimal spiritual energy anyways. It would suffice. Wei WuXian reluctantly tucks his flute into his belt and takes the bow from Lan Wangji’s extended hand.

“Let’s go.” Lan Wangji stays close to his side as they creep their way through the trees to where the Wens had their camps. Wei WuXian draws his bow first with the Jiang disciples following his movement.

“Spread out first,” Wei WuXian orders them. “Don’t shoot from one direction. Get up high if you need to. And don’t fire until you see my arrow first.” The disciples follow his order, spreading out in different directions. Wei WuXian takes out the first arrow. Then he takes out a talisman from inside his robes as well. He can feel Lan Wangji’s gaze on him as he pricks his finger on the point of the arrow to draw out the characters on the talisman.

“Watch this, Lan Zhan.” He sticks the talisman tight to the arrow, inserts the arrow into the bow and draws his arms back. He curses as he already feels the intense strain in his muscle and soreness in his arms. Then he feels hands on his shoulders and arms. The warm stream of energy that flows through them gives him momentary strength and he fires.

The arrow flies through the air and then dives downwards. The cries of alarm informed them that it had hit its mark. Other arrows begin flying through the air as well.

Wei WuXian and Lan Wangji spring forward from their positions. The talisman that Wei WuXian had stuck on the arrow had created a fog that prevented the Wen soldiers from seeing their sneak attack. The Jiang disciples and Lan Wangji take out the Wen soldiers with their swords, fully using the fog to their advantage.

“Let’s go quickly before other Wen soldiers come,” Wei WuXian urges. They nod and hurry out of the area.

“We can fly,” One of the older disciples says. “But we need to stay low or else we will be spotted.”

“Ah...,” Wei WuXian begins, but Lan Wangji takes out Bichen and wraps one hand around Wei WuXian’s waist to pull him onto it.

“Let’s go,” He tells the disciples. Everyone mounts onto their sword. Wei WuXian wraps his arms tight around Lan Wangji’s waist. He feels the wind blowing through his face. There was a time when Wei WuXian loved it. He would practice his sword flying and race his brother across the lake, feeling the wind whipping his hair back. But now he could only do those things in dreams. *The last time he had been this high up...*

He shivers and presses closer to Lan Wangji’s back.

“Wei Ying?” His voice is concerned.

“It’s nothing,” Wei WuXian says quickly. “Lan-er gege, let me hold you close just this once? I know you don’t like being touched, but I can’t cling onto anything else.”

“Mn.” There was no protest or annoyance. Only a gentleness and softness that Wei WuXian missed so much from his husband.

“We’re close to Yiling, we should land soon,” Wei WuXian says loudly, making sure the disciples can hear. They fly towards the ground and land, walking the rest of the way towards the Yiling Supervisory Office. There were only two soldiers in the gate and they were swiftly taken out by Lan Wangji with a few swipes of Bichen. They open the door, swords at the ready.

“Wait!” Wei WuXian calls out, recognizing the woman who stood before them. “Lower your swords.”

“But she’s a *Wen* !” A disciple protests.

“ *Now* .” He makes his voice much firmer. The swords get lowered and the disciples watch with wary expressions as Wei WuXian steps in front of Wen Qing. A few of them turn around to keep an eye on the surrounding area.

“Wei WuXian, what are you doing here?” Wen Qing’s voice is confused and wary.

“To save you from Wen Ruohan,” He answers simply. “Come with me and you will be safe.”

“Wei WuXian, I may be safe, but Wen Ning...they...they took him away,” Tears spring up in her eyes.

“Once we defeat Wen Ruohan, Jiang Cheng and I have promised to help you find him.” Wen Qing only stares dubiously at him with her eyes narrowed.

“I *promise* . We owe you a debt,” Wei WuXian says. “We *will* find him. The rest of your family will be safe too.”

For a brief moment, Wei WuXian was scared she’d refuse, but she unsheathes her swords and nods.

“I will come with you.”

“Da Shi-xiong, is she our prisoner?” One of the disciples asks. Wen Qing immediately stiffens and Wei WuXian shakes his head at him.

“No...Wen Qing is not an enemy.” He addresses all the disciples as he speaks. They look at him with surprised and confused looks as he continues. “ It’s only because of her and Wen Ning that Shijie, Jiang Cheng and I survived. She is our friend and will be treated as such. But for now, we must get her back to Unclean Realm.”

“Okay,” The disciple nods curtly, though the look in his eyes is still wary. After driving back more Wen soldiers from Yiling territory, they fell back and returned back to Unclean Realm.

“Sect leader, they’ve arrived.” Jiang Cheng rises from his desk and follows the disciples out to the entrance of Unclean Realm. It had only taken a few days for Wei WuXian to return, but Jiang Cheng had still felt anxious about sending him into enemy territory, even with Lan Wangji protecting him. Unsurprisingly, Nie Mingjue and a few of his disciples were already there. He can see Wei WuXian’s tense expression even from a distance so he hurries over to deescalate the possible situation.

“Jiang Cheng, you got here just in time. I want Sect leader Nie to know that Wen Qing isn’t a threat and to trust me. And that there’s no reason to imprison her.” There’s an angry undertone to Wei WuXian’s voice that Jiang Cheng knows too well.

“Chifeng-zun,” Jiang Cheng greets the Nie sect leader formally. “I can take her into my custody now.”

“I will still have my disciples monitoring her as well, as this is my home and territory. She will be under your custody after the war, though I am not sure what Jin Guangshan will have to say about that.” Jiang Cheng tightens his grip on Sandu involuntarily at the mention of that man. Jin Guangshan had been the main push of the wedge between him and Wei WuXian in the past. He was sure to be after the Stygian Tiger Amulet in this timeline as well. *A slimy power-greedy bastard like him will never change.*

“Understood. I do not intend to undermine your authority in your own home,” Jiang Cheng bows to him. “I hope that during the next few days, you and your disciples will be able to see that Wen Qing is someone who can be trusted.”

“I hope so as well.” Nie Mingjue narrows his eyes at Wen Qing.

“You are a doctor, correct?” He addresses her in a gruff voice.

“I am,” She speaks confidently.

“I will allow you to assist the injured. My men and Jiang Wanyin’s men can keep an eye on you there.”

“Thank you, Sect leader Nie,” Wen Qing bows to him. Wei WuXian and Jiang Cheng escort her into the camp and to the tent where the wounded were.

“Lady Wen, I am so glad to see you safe,” A-jie immediately walks over to greet her.

“Lady Jiang, I am glad you are okay as well.” She gives her a warm smile.

“Your brother...,” A-jie begins, her eyes flickering over to Jiang Cheng with a questioning look on her face.

“They took him away,” Wen Qing says shakily. The stress in her voice was a familiar one to Jiang Cheng. It was the same worry and fear that A-jie had shown after Jiang Cheng had told his sister that Wei WuXian was missing. He still remembers the grief and restlessness the both of them had felt during those three months, the fear that their only other family might be dead.

“We will find him,” Wei WuXian says. “For now, we will focus on winning this war.” His eyes meet Jiang Cheng’s briefly and he nods at his brother.

“Will we really be able to keep her safe? Even if she was not involved in the war...there’s too much hatred against the Wens right now,” A-jie says worriedly.

“If the other sects insist on indicting her even after, I will marry her to protect her.” The words come out of his mouth without thinking and he’s faced with three pairs of eyes staring at him in shock.

“I mean...if you are willing to be my sect lady,” Jiang Cheng says quickly, looking at Wen Qing.

“If it means protecting my family, then yes, I will do it,” Wen Qing answers him. “I do have information I will be willing to share as well.”

“I will inform the other sect leaders of this then. And Jin Zixuan should know as well.” Wei WuXian gives him a look at this, but doesn’t say anything. *Jin Zixuan is nothing like his father, we both know this. He can be trusted.*

Jiang Cheng leaves the room with Wei WuXian while A-jie stays behind with Wen Qing. As per agreement, one Nie and one Jiang disciple keep guard by the door.

“Are the guards enough to protect her?” Wei WuXian asks.

“What do you mean? No one will attack her when there’s a Nie guard with her as well,” Jiang Cheng says.

“I wouldn’t put it past Jin Zixun and his men to try anything,” Wei WuXian points out. “Even if he were on Chifeng-zun’s territory.”

He’s right, Jiang Cheng realizes. Jin Zixun was arrogant and reckless. He hated the Wens too much, no matter their age or status. He had been the one to put elderly men, women and children into labor camps to be tortured.

“Try to avoid him. We know how much trouble he caused last time.”

“I wasn’t *not* avoiding him last time and trouble still happened,” Wei WuXian points out flatly. “As if I would willingly stay within ten feet of a rat like him,” He adds.

“What I meant to say was.” Jiang Cheng turns to his brother. “Be careful.” Wei WuXian meets his eyes and gives him a reassuring smile. However, Jiang Cheng doesn’t feel reassurance. The smile is one Jiang Cheng recognises on his brother whenever he was hiding something or when something was bothering him. Before he can say anything, Lan Wangji appears and Wei WuXian immediately slips away to talk to him. They disappear around a corner just as Nie Mingjue appears around another one.

“Jiang Cheng, I really hope you know what you are doing, allowing her into our camp,” Nie Mingjue says as he walks up to him with a hard expression on his face. “Even if you say she can be trusted, I will have to judge for myself through her actions here. From what I

remember, she was someone Wen Ruohan kept very close to him. Where her loyalty lies, we do not know yet.”

Jiang Cheng lifts his chin and meets the other man’s eye.

“Her loyalty is to her family. That does not include Wen Chao and Wen Ruohan. They have only harmed her family and she will not tolerate that.”

“None of us do,” Nie Mingjue’s voice is soft and sympathetic. Jiang Cheng swallows, thinking about the death of his parents and all the other disciples in his sect. Only a small handful had survived the massacre.

“Wen Qing’s loyalty will be to us as long as her family is unharmed and spared from being punished. I assure you she is a valuable asset to us, not only because of her famous medical skills, but we also have a chance of getting inside information.” Nie Mingjue raises his eyebrows at this.

“Will she be willing to give it to us?”

“If her family will be safe, then yes,” Jiang Cheng tells him. Even so many years after her death, a part of him held onto Wen Qing. He had wanted to save her, but hadn’t the power to do so. This time, it would be different.

“And how will you ensure that she will remain loyal after her people are rescued?”

“She’s...agreed to marry me,” Jiang Cheng says. He waits for Nie Mingjue to rebuke him, but the man only looks at him in surprise and waits for him to continue.

“Her loyalty will be to me and my sect after the war is over. Her family members will be loyal as well. She is a woman who keeps her word and I will keep mine as well,” He pauses before continuing.

“I know what everyone thinks about the Wens right now, but the Dafan Wens have never agreed to the things Wen Ruohan has done. They wish to be free from his treacherous ruling as much as we do. It is unfair for us to assume every one of them is loyal to a monster like him.”

“Very well,” Nie Mingjue nods at last, allowing the lines in his face to smooth out. “I hope she will be able to provide us with trustworthy information. If she is able to contribute to our campaign by doing this, I will make sure her efforts will be commended.” Nie Mingjue walks away and Jiang Cheng lets out the breath he had been holding.

During the next couple of days, Wen Qing stays in the medical tents with A-jie to assist with the injured. Jiang Cheng and his disciples join Jin Zixuan and his own disciples to continue to drive out the soldiers from the nearby towns. Jiang Cheng had seen Wei WuXian and Lan Wangji together several times, but hadn’t asked what they had been doing. He didn’t know if Wei WuXian planned to tell Lan Wangji that they had gone back in time, but what he did know is that Lan Wangji was willing to do anything to protect his brother. And that in itself

would be important to Jiang Cheng. *We'll have to stay alive and keep everyone we love alive. We can't let this go in vain.*

During the next meeting, Wen Qing, as promised, shares information about Wen Ruohan with him, Nie Mingjue, and Jin Zixuan. Jiang Cheng thanks the heavens above that Jin Zixun just happened to be absent from this particular war meeting. The last thing Jiang Cheng needed to add to his ever-growing anxiety and stress was seeing that man's face. He doesn't find Lan Xichen's absence strange either. This had happened last time and he had walked in holding the map provided to him by Jin Guangyao.

"If you need somebody to get you into Nightless City, I can guide you. I know secret passages in and out of the palace."

"No, it's too dangerous!" Jiang Cheng snaps immediately. *Nie Mingjue had been fine last time...except for the fact that Wen Ruohan injured him.* Jiang Cheng swallows. *If they tried to save Nie Mingjue too...no...the only way to do that was to stop Jin Guangyao.*

"He is right," Nie Mingjue says quietly. "If Wen Ruohan knows you betrayed him, he will not spare your life nor the life of your family."

"My men and I plan to sneak in to assassinate Wen Ruohan. While he is distracted, you have the chance to rescue Wen Ning. Wen Ruohan must be keeping him somewhere in the palace."

"A puppet," Wen Qing breathes out. Jiang Cheng flinches at the words. Wen Ning had been turned into a fierce corpse. The sweet, kind boy who had saved him and his siblings had been turned into the Ghost General. And it was all because of what the Jins did.

"Everyone, I have something to report." Jiang Cheng immediately turns his attention to the entrance of the tent. *Right on time.*

He listens as Lan Xichen takes out the map of Nightless City and explains it to them. *I should have known back then that Jin Guangyao was not who people thought he was. To be able to sneak into Wen Ruohan's territory, pretend to be his subordinate and copy out a map to be sent to us? Nie Mingjue had been right to be suspicious of him.*

"The map is accurate," Wen Qing says affirmatively.

"Then we have a plan. We will win this."

We will, Jiang Cheng thinks silently. Wei WuXian will do what he did last time and we will win. Jiang Cheng knows it.

Wei WuXian walks out of his room after spending the entire morning trying to control the resentful energy from the Stygian Tiger Seal. This time, it was not as difficult as the first time. He was familiar with it and it was also familiar with him, as if it *knew* who he was.

"Wei WuXian." He stops at Wen Qing's voice.

“Wen Qing, is everything okay?”

“I wanted to ask *you* that. Jiang Cheng told me what happened to you. After...after the golden core transfer.”

“What did he tell you?” Wei WuXian tries to keep his voice steady, but the tremors slip out anyways.

“You were thrown into the Burial Mounds. Is that true? How did you get out?” Her eyes narrow as he quickly places ChenQing behind his back.

“It’s not what you think. It’s my Stygian Tiger Amulet.”

“Did you forge it from Yin Iron?” Wei WuXian inhales sharply at the question. *How did she know?* As if she can read his mind, she lets out an exasperated sigh.

“I’ve worked with Wen Ruohan for years. Do you think I can not make out the effects of that thing? Even at first glance?” Then she steps closer to him, reaching out to grab his wrist firmly. He tries pulling away, but she tightens her grip.

“Where did you get it?” Her voice isn’t accusing, but there’s an underlying fear to it. Wei WuXian swallows.

“There was a Yin Iron sword inside the Xuanwu tortoise. I forged my amulet from it,” he confesses.

“But I am not using the same wicked tricks Wen Ruohan is, I swear.” He adds hurriedly. It’s a new kind of cultivation...it’s different but I can control it.” *This was mostly true of course. In the past timeline, he had struggled a lot with the amulet. But this time, he technically had years more of experience. All the knowledge he had learned in the previous timeline had been brought with him.*

“You will need help,” Wen Qing insists. “This type of cultivation, however different it is, still affects your health, mind and body.”

“I know.” Wei WuXian moves her hand away gently and holds onto it. “But you have to trust me. You know I won’t be evil like Wen Ruohan, right?”

“Of course I know that,” Wen Qing retorts. “But you need to be careful. You can’t let it overwhelm you.”

“I’ll be careful,” Wei WuXian promises her. *Things should go the same as last time if not better. After all, I have more experience this time.* As Wen Qing walks away, he sees a familiar figure in white.

“Lan Zhan!” Wei WuXian greets him warmly. “Were you looking for me?”

“Mn. Did Lady Wen get settled?” Wei WuXian notices that he’s looking at the corner where Wen Qing had just disappeared. There’s a hint of jealousy in his eyes.

Had he seen me talking to Wen Qing just now?

“Shijie is with her,” Wei WuXian tells him. “Does your brother know she’s here? I mean, I know Jiang Cheng told him she would be staying here, but what I mean is,” Wei WuXian pauses. “Does he know *why* she’s here...and does he trust her?”

“He knows she is not an enemy,” He answers. “I told him about how she helped you.”

“Will the Lan sect be lenient about the fact that the Yunmeng Jiang sect is protecting her and the Dafan Wens?” Last time, Jiang Cheng had been worried about the other sects turning against his own if he protected the Wens, but this time, Wei WuXian had a bigger chance of exposing the Jin sect’s crimes. Jiang Cheng was willing to protect Wen Qing this time and had stood up for her, informing the sect leaders of her contribution to the Sunshot campaign and she would have the chance to contribute even more and prove her loyalty.

“My brother will not protest against keeping non-combatants and those who did not participate in the war from being spared from punishment.”

“I see...if the other sects, the Nie or the Jin tried to punish them, what would he do?” Lan Wangji gives him a strange look at all the questions Wei WuXian is throwing at him.

“The other sect leaders will and should follow the rules of justice,” Lan Wangji begins. “Wei Ying, why are you worried?”

“I’m not,” Wei WuXian says quickly but Lan Wangji stares him down so he continues. “It’s just that everyone holds immense hatred for all Wens and anyone with that surname. People can get blinded by hatred and can no longer see or understand what is justice. They will get influenced by that hatred to determine what is black and white and what is right or wrong.” Lan Wangji is silent for a long time, his golden eyes locked with Wei WuXian’s silver ones. He doesn’t look away. He can’t rip his eyes away from those perfect features that he loved so much. Having been married to him in the future, he can now read his husband so much better. He can see the longing in those golden eyes; it was subtle but it was enough to make his heart ache with that same longing. Lan Zhan wasn’t his husband yet, but those nights in the Jingshi they had spent together seemed so far away. It felt like it had been months, maybe even years since they held on each other as they slept throughout the night.

Those were the nights he had been the most at peace, had felt the happiest since the loss of his core, the death of his Shijie and the Wens that he had loved like his own family.

“Wei Ying?” Lan Wangji had stepped closer to him without realizing, a look of concern in his eyes. Wei WuXian hastily wipes the corner of his eye, feeling the wetness of a tear there. *Last time, he had constantly pushed Lan Zhan away. He had pushed everyone away, even Jiang Cheng and Shijie. He hadn’t known Lan Zhan..*

“It’s nothing...Lan Zhan,” Wei WuXian says quietly. “If...if Jiang Cheng and I...if we can’t protect Wen Qing, her brother and her innocent family members, what can I do? What can *we* do?”

Lan Wangji opens his mouth to speak, but Wei WuXian continues.

“We made a promise together. That day we released the lanterns.”

“I, Wei WuXian, wish that I can always stand with justice and live without regrets.”

“Yes,” Lan Wangji says softly.

Maybe this time, I will take my chances. I want to keep him by my side from now on. I don't want to wait thirteen years or even one year.

“Then, will you stand with me? Will you stay by my side?” Wei WuXian leans in so close that he can feel Lan Zhan's shaky breath on his face.

“Always. I will always support Wei Ying.”

I won't make you wait. And I won't wait either.

He lifts his hand, cupping Lan Zhan's face in it and kisses him softly on the lips. He feels the man stiffen under him, but Wei WuXian is pulling back and walking away before Lan Wangji can react. *After we defeat Wen Ruohan...after that I promise, we will be together...and as long as Jiang Cheng and I can save everyone, we will be happy and carefree in the future.*

The day to liberate Nightless City came quickly. Disciples from all four sects fight through the waves of fierce corpses to get closer and closer to the palace. However, Wei WuXian had his own plan. On the day Nie Mingjue and his disciples left to sneak into Nightless City according to plan, Wei WuXian follows them secretly from behind. He had made sure to leave long after everyone was asleep in the camp. Getting past the guards wasn't easy, but he had managed to do it through the guise of the shadows of resentful energy that surrounded him. The fierce corpses that had been guarding the city and the land around it had quickly been taken over by him through the music he played on ChenQing.

Jiang Cheng is going to kill me. Wei WuXian thinks. *Even if I make it out of this alive, he'll be furious at me for what I did.*

Taking a deep breath, he walks through the gates and into the courtyard, closer and closer to the palace. He finds a hiding spot in a tree, only a little while away from where Nie Mingjue and his men slept. He had to sneak into the palace before them. Only then would he be close enough to destroy the Yin Iron and take control of Wen Ruohan's fierce corpses.

Chapter End Notes

WWX: okay Jiang Cheng let's work together

Also WWX: *being self sacrificing and reckless*

Jc is NOT gonna be happy next chapter 😞 Wei Ying, please stop putting yourself in danger like that after you promised to be a team 😞

Chapter 4

I'll going to fucking kill that idiot! Jiang Cheng thinks, his heart thudding in his chest as he reads the note Wei WuXian had left on his desk. Feelings of rage, frustration and worry all bundle up inside him. His frustration only grows when Lan Wangji storms in, forgetting all courtesy, his eyes filled with an anger Jiang Cheng is all too familiar with

“Where is Wei Ying?” He demands.

“He left,” Jiang Cheng snaps in reply. “That idiot...he went to Nightless City by himself! He followed Chifeng-zun!”

“He did *what* ?” A-jie cries out as she steps into his room. Wen Qing is beside her, her face pale with worry. Jin Zixuan is there too, his eyes narrowed in concern and confusion.

“Why would he run into danger like that? And he didn’t tell anyone either!” Wen Qing demands, her eyes flaring with a mixture of annoyance, anger and worry. Jiang Cheng swallows.

Because he has the Stygian Tiger Seal...and he wanted to use it to his advantage earlier than in the original timeline.

“He has something that will guarantee us a victory,” Jiang Cheng tells them at last.

“The amulet?” Wen Qing narrows her eyes. “Did he tell you where he got it from? What it is made of?”

“I already knew,” Jiang Cheng replies.

“A-Cheng, what?” His sister looks at him with a questioning look in her eyes while Lan Wangji’s eyes still glare into him. Even Jin Zixuan looks worried.

“He will help us win. You have to trust him.” Jiang Cheng swallows. “He knows what he’s doing.”

“How do you know that?” Wen Qing asks sharply. “Don’t you know by now how powerful Wen Ruohan is? The three sects put together have had a difficult time penetrating Nightless City. What makes you think he can do it alone?”

“The seal is the key to our victory,” Jiang Cheng answers calmly. “I will explain more after we win. We both have explaining to do.”

We won’t tell them about the time traveling...maybe not yet, but we will have to see.

“We hope you’re right,” Wen Qing says, staring into her eyes. “If Sect leader Nie can not succeed, then Wei WuXian may be our only hope.” She walks away with A-jie, but Lan Wangji lingers, his eyes fixed on Jiang Cheng.

“Why are you so confident about Wei Ying succeeding?” His voice is quiet, but underneath that, Jiang Cheng can hear the undertones of fear and worry as well as confusion. *Since when did I get so good at reading Lan Wangji?*

“I have faith in him. He is strong and he is smart. He is one of the Twin Prides of Yunmeng. He will succeed.”

By some miracle, Wei WuXian had managed to follow Nie Mingjue and his men without being detected. His black robes made it easy for him to blend in along the palace walls and hallways. Without Suibian, he snatches up one of the swords from a Wen soldier who had been killed by Nie Mingjue on his way in and makes his way closer to the throne room. He cuts down the Wens guarding it and creeps closer to where he can hear the mixed voices of Wen Ruohan and Nie Mingjue. He peeks around the corner where he sees Wen Ruohan summoning resentful energy, readying to attack Nie Mingjue who knelt leaning on Baxia just a few feet away. With a sharp whistle, he redirects the resentful energy so that it knocks Wen Ruohan backwards instead. Nie Mingjue looks around in surprise and Wen Ruohan does the same once he has regained his balance, his eyes narrowing as he scans the room.

Wei WuXian was already ready to confront him. He was ready to show just how much power he possessed with just the amulet and his music skills. *Let's end this quickly...*

However, before he can enter the hall, a pair of arms pull him back. On instinct, he swings his sword around, but it's blocked by another one. He finds him staring back into a familiar face. He had last seen this face in Guanyin Temple with a devious smile on his face, a smile he had managed to keep upon his face despite all of his crimes being exposed before him.

“You!” He had forgotten to keep his voice down. This man, Jin Guangyao...no, he is still Meng Yao, presses a finger desperately to his lips, telling him to be quiet.

“Young Master Wei, please. We don't want anyone to hear you.”

“Why are...you here?” It was a dumb question as Wei WuXian already knew the reason, but technically, he wasn't supposed to, so he had to feign dumb.

“I'd like to ask you the same question,” Meng Yao replies, his voice even and calm. “How did you get into Wen Ruohan's palace? Did you come with Chifeng-Zun and get separated from the group?”

Wei WuXian takes a few cautious steps backwards, his hand still gripping the sword in caution. This man had been the root of all the troubles Wei WuXian had to suffer through in the past timeline. But he can't attack him. Meng Yao still needed to kill Wen Ruohan for them. Only he was capable of doing it. And perhaps this time, they would have a chance to save Meng Yao from turning into the man he became.

“You’re...you’re the one Zewu-jun was talking about.” He makes sure to drop his voice down to a whisper this time. Meng Yao had pushed them both into a small corner behind a statue to talk.

“I can’t stay here. It’ll jeopardize my position,” Meng Yao replies. “You need to get out of here.”

“I’m not leaving. I have my own mission to do. But we both share a goal and it’s to kill Wen Ruohan.” Wei WuXian narrows his eyes.

“Then I need you to cooperate with me. Can you do that?”

Wei WuXian hesitates, looking down at the man who had eventually become the one responsible behind so many deaths: the Wens, Jin Zixuan, Shijie and himself. But he was there to change that. Perhaps he could save lives in more than just keeping them alive.

“Okay.” He nods, looking directly at the man.

He goes along with the plan Meng Yao discusses with him. The Wen soldiers that drag him down into the dungeons are far from gentle, but he only suffers a few kicks to the side before he’s thrown into a cell. His hands are chained and both the flute and the amulet are taken, but he isn’t worried. He sits in a lotus position on the cold floor of the dungeon, concentrating on the resentful energy around him. He doesn’t know when the next day arrived due to no light coming through the dungeon, but a guard wearing a hood visits his cell when he awakens the next morning. Peeking under the cloak, his eyes widened in alarm.

“Wen Ning?” He whispers, sitting up. Wen Ning presses a finger to his mouth and slips the qiankun pouch holding the amulet to him. He hadn’t been able to find the flute, but Wei WuXian simply thanks him and slips the amulet into his robes. As he watches Wen Ning slip away, he can’t help but feel surprised that Meng Yao had somehow teamed up with Wen Ning. It was strange and unfamiliar given what had happened in the previous timeline.

Wei WuXian waits for an hour more before he begins whistling, a shrill sound coming from his throat. He directs all his resentment to the Wen soldiers, the ones that had murdered and killed his sect members, other sect members and innocent people. He can’t see them, but he is in control now. He can hear the screaming of the soldiers and the yells of alarm. A few moments later, Wen Ning comes to unlock his cell.

“Get out of here. Find Jiang Cheng,” Wei WuXian orders. “This battle isn’t over yet, but your sister needs you to be safe.” Wen Ning’s eyes widened.

“My sister-?” Wei WuXian doesn’t give him a chance to finish before he cuts him off.

“*Go ! Now!*” He gives Wen Ning a fierce push who hesitates for a few seconds more before running off. Wei WuXian runs to the throne room. He goes into the secret passageway Meng Yao had told him about. He keeps flute playing low and shrill, but pours all his energy into it, keeping it steady. He can feel himself taking control of the countless amount of fierce corpses far outside the palace door.

“Who is doing that?” Wen Ruohan roars, his voice shaking the room. Wei WuXian continues whistling, hearing Wen Ruohan shout in frustration as he’s unable to use the Yin Iron in front of him. In fact the Yin Iron had fallen to the floor as if all its energy had been spent. The corpses outside must have stopped by now. Wei WuXian continues playing his flute, changing the tune into a more calming one. In a quick few seconds, the energy he felt controlling the fierce corpses dispersed and faded away completely. He catches a glimpse of Wen Ruohan’s astonished expression and in the background, hears the faint cheering of cultivators from outside. They were going to win.

“Me,” Wei WuXian steps out from his hiding spot, throwing the Wen soldier cloak he had put on earlier onto the ground. He sees Nie Mingjue swinging his head around to look at him, confusion and shock written all over his face. By now Nie Mingjue must have realized who had redirected the resentful energy aimed towards him a few days ago. *At least I saved him from his future qi deviation...that is if Jin Guangyao doesn’t suck up to his father again and follows his orders to have Nie Mingjue killed.*

“You?! Where did you get your piece of Yin Iron from? Was it Xue Yang?” Wen Ruohan spits. Wei WuXian scoffs.

“I’ve been dead once before. We of course...came from hell.”

Wei WuXian could hear the clang of swords outside the doors. Jiang Cheng and the other sects were coming closer to him.

“My spiritual tool is not called ‘Yin Iron’. I call it the Stygian Tiger Amulet.” As he speaks, he reveals the amulet from his Qiankun pouch. Just as quickly, he feels Wen Ruohan reach his hand towards him and the amulet. Leaving the amulet where it was, he feels the almost familiar grip of Wen Ruohan’s hands around his throat. It was only for a short while, but having already exhausted his spiritual energy, he can feel his vision blurring as the hand tightens. He catches a glimpse of Meng Yao creeping up behind Wen Ruohan and stabbing it into his chest before everything goes black.

The sects continued forward on their liberation to Nightless City. They were inside the courtyard now, facing hundreds of fierce corpses. Last time, Wei WuXian had been on the battlefield with them and had only interfered when they were getting too overwhelmed. Jiang Cheng can’t help but feel relieved that Wei WuXian wasn’t with them this time. The only one who had been shielding him from attacks from his side and rear was Lan Wangji. Now the man in white was fighting without anyone next to him, cutting down the fierce corpses and Wen soldiers with quick slashes of his sword. At one point, he took out his guqin and sent out waves of spiritual energy, using the Lan sect’s famous Assassination Chord technique. Jiang Cheng notices that there were a lot less fierce corpses than the last time. There weren’t any new oncoming fierce corpses coming from the palace.

Jiang Cheng had fought by his side before when they were looking for Wei WuXian during the months he was missing. Fighting alongside him with Zidian made them seem like a surprisingly good team, he had to admit. But no one matched his movements the way Wei WuXian did when they fought together. Swallowing hard, he thinks of a time when they used

to duel each other in the courtyard while training, knocking each other over and laughing. Clenching his fist, he swings out another attack at the oncoming wave of fierce corpses.

They would never have those carefree days again of sword training or even a friendly duel. But they could still save the days they had lost together. They could save the future they were never able to have due to those dark days from the past timeline. Just as Jiang Cheng prepares himself to attack with Zidian again, a shrill flute rings out across the courtyard. He freezes in his movement, jumping away from the fierce corpse that swung its sword at him. Lan Wangji's movements seem to halt as well, his eyes searching around for the source of the noise. Wei WuXian wasn't on the rooftop this time, Jiang Cheng can see. He had looked all around, but seen no figure on either the rooftop or the stone figure he had stood on last time. Yet the shrill noise of the flute continues to ring out.

At the sound of his music, the fierce corpses turn their swords on one another instead of the cultivators around them. This gives Jiang Cheng the opportunity to run past them and towards the palace. Lan Wangji is right behind him, followed by Lan Xichen and several dozen disciples. When they burst through the hall, the first thing they see is Wen Ruohan's lifeless body in the center of the room. Lan Xichen goes straight to where Meng Yao and Nie Mingjue are. Wei WuXian lays on the ground only a few feet away

"Wei Ying!" Lan Wangji hurries to the man's side with Jiang Cheng following suit.

"Is he alright?" Jiang Cheng narrows his eyes as he scans Wei WuXian's pale face. There were cuts and bruises in his brother's face that hadn't been seen last time. Jiang Cheng swallows. *Had they caught him and tortured him in the dungeon when he had snuck into the palace?*

"I don't know," Lan Wangji replies, keeping his eyes fixed on Wei WuXian.

He was alive though. We both survived the second time. Jiang Cheng thinks.

In the past, he would have thought the war was the worst thing they had to survive through, but now he knows that is not true. There were still more hardships waiting ahead for the both of them. Whether or not it'd end up with even more bloodshed was up to them.

Chapter 5

Jiang Cheng had still expected Wei WuXian to wake up after three days like the last time. But three days have come and gone and Wei WuXian still hasn't awoken. Wen Qing has told him that he simply needed to rest after using so much spiritual energy, but that does little to reassure Jiang Cheng as he looks at his brother's resting form on the bed that evening. He hadn't realized how much could change just because Wei WuXian had snuck off into Nightless City recklessly. So far, the only change that had occurred was Wei WuXian's delayed awakening, but he didn't know if there would be more changes or it would be bad ones. His head spins as he thinks of all the events that he had to fix, but also the ones he could not change too much or it'd lead to consequences. The most important change was to keep both his siblings alive and by doing that he had to be wary of the Jin sect. However, he still needed to have his nephew, Jin Ling to be born into existence, therefore he could not get on their bad side or his sister and Jin Zixuan's marriage would be at risk. There were too many things to consider.

He now couldn't feel more relieved that he had been dragged into the time traveling mess with Wei WuXian. How could anyone do it alone? He couldn't protect his brother in the previous timeline, but this time he'd make sure he would.

He decides to lead his disciples in driving out the remaining Wens from Qishan. He allows his sister and Wen Qing to stay by Wei WuXian's side, telling Wen Qing sternly to send him a butterfly message if anything changes. While outside, he makes sure to keep his eye out for Wen Ning and his family as he had promised Wen Qing. With the help from the Nie Sect and Jin Zixuan, it didn't take long. However they find themselves confronting Jin Zixun and several disciples with him.

"Sect leader Jiang, why do you take interest in these people? They are Wens," The man sneers when Jiang Cheng tells him that he would be taking the Dafan Wens with him.

"Yes, they are," Jiang Cheng replies calmly. "But they are elderly, women, and children. What reason do you have to be aiming your weapons at them, Young Master Jin? You were aiming your bow at a mother carrying a child." Nie Mingjue doesn't speak but he narrows his eyes in disdain at Jin Zixun. However much he hated the Wens, he did not condone violence against innocent civilians. Jin Zixun only curls his lips and doesn't speak again.

"ZiXun, we do not aim our weapons at innocent people," Jin Zixuan scolds.

"Who's innocent?" Jin Zixun sneers. "The Wen-dogs destroyed so much or have you forgotten? Their very existence is evil!"

Jiang Cheng can feel sparks crackling out of Zidian, but holds himself back from stepping forward.

"You'd justify aiming your weapon at a child?" Nie Mingjue growls, finally speaking up before Jiang Cheng can. Jin Zixun lowers his eyes immediately under Nie Mingjue's sharp glare.

“These Wens are Wen Qing’s family. We promised her that they’d be unharmed,” Jiang Cheng says, glaring at Jin Zixun as he speaks.

“Do you trust these Wens to stay with you in Lotus Pier? You don’t even have enough disciples to guard everyone.” Nie Mingjue asks him. Jiang Cheng winces at the mention of his diminished sect but keeps a straight face.

“They won’t try to harm us,” Jiang Cheng says with reassurance, looking over at Wen Ning as he speaks.

“Y-young Master Wei and I have been close friends since Cloud Recesses,” Wen Ning says in a quiet voice, lifting his eyes up to look at Nie Mingjue. “I have no reason to hurt him or his family.”

“But you didn’t try to stop Wen Ruohan either,” Nie Mingjue grunts. Jiang Cheng presses his lips together at this. Nie Mingjue had said the same thing last time, saying neither Wen Ning or Wen Qing should be shown mercy for their lack of opposition.

Wen Ning lifts himself up bravely as he continues speaking.

“I am one person. What can I possibly do? My sister and I have never raised a sword against anyone before and we hardly stand a chance against stopping Wen Ruohan by ourselves. Our family have been doctors for generations and have rarely had cultivators.”

“He and Wen Qing saved me and my siblings. That was already a risky move,” Jiang Cheng interjects. “Wen Chao and his men were looking everywhere for us. Wen Ning is right. It took all five sects joined together to stop this man. How could one person have any power in stopping him? Neither of them could risk speaking out against him when their family was at risk.”

“I...I did see Young Master Wei in Nightless City...I was able to help him. Young Master Meng Yao was also there,” Wen Ning stammers. Nie Mingjue’s attention on Wen Ning sharpens at the mention of that name. Jiang Cheng turns to him as well.

“You saw Meng Yao? You knew he was a spy for us?” Nie Mingjue demands.

“I did...He often came to the cell I was being held in. Wen Ruohan put him in charge of torturing prisoners,” Wen Ning says. Jiang Cheng clenches his fists suddenly.

“Did he hurt my brother?” His voice has a dangerous edge to it now. In the past, he knew Meng Yao had killed the disciples that had gone into Nightless City with him. It was the main reason that Nie Mingjue was so mistrustful of the man afterwards, even if he had contributed in killing Wen Ruohan.

Wen Ning looks startled but shakes his head firmly.

“N-no!” Wen Ning exclaims. “He let me out of my cell then had me let Young Master Wei out. He told me to flee right afterwards. From what I know, the two worked together to take down Wen Ruohan.”

Jiang Cheng slowly exhales the breath he had been holding in. *Wei WuXian worked together with Jin Guangyao? Now that...was certainly not what he had expected.* If he prevented Meng Yao from killing Nie Mingjue's men, then perhaps the fires of hatred between the two men would not arise like they did in the past timeline.

"I always knew Meng Yao was brilliant and intelligent," Nie Mingjue says quietly. "I did not expect him to be able to sneak into Nightless City and earn Wen Ruohan's trust."

"Some people are not how they look on the surface," Jiang Cheng replies calmly.

"We'll leave these Wens," Nie Mingjue jerks his head at Wen Ning and the people huddled behind him. "To you then, Jiang Wanyin. I trust that you will be able to keep your eye on them."

"Of course." Jiang Cheng dips his head.

"What will happen to the other Wen dogs then?" Jin Zixun interrupts rudely. "Are we going to simply let them go free?"

"JiXun-," Jin Zixuan begins.

"No, of course not," Nie Mingjue retorts. "The other sect leaders and I have yet to discuss what to do with them. The best course of actions that I see is to confide them to a plot of land somewhere and keep an eye on them. They can continue to live as they always did before the war as long as they do not cause trouble."

They can as long as the Jins are not in charge of "keeping an eye" on them, Jiang Cheng thinks, remembering his brother's claims of the harsh and unforgiving treatment the Jins had given the Wen prisoners. He doesn't have a strong standing in the cultivation world right now, but he had to do whatever it takes to make sure the Jins were not given the burden of overseeing the Wen civilians, otherwise it would only end badly.

"I think the Nie Sect will ensure fair justice for them and so will the Lan," Jiang Cheng says evenly. "After all, we can't blame the innocent for the fault of their relatives, can we?" He looks directly at Jin Zixun as he speaks.

"I will bring this up at the next conference meeting, but I wish to say it here as well. Lotus Pier has enough space to house extra people."

"You mean to say you'll be offering them a place in your sect?" Nie Mingjue's voice is surprised now and genuinely curious. "Were the Wens not the same people who destroyed Lotus Pier?"

"The Wens who burned down my home are dead," Jiang Cheng says calmly. "What I meant to say was I could use the extra hands to help me rebuild the sect. It is only fitting, is it not?"

"Work labor then." Nie Mingjue tilts his head. Jiang Cheng sees Wen Ning look over at him at this but he can't read the younger boy's expression.

“In a way,” Jiang Cheng agrees. “But for Wen Qing and her family, it is because of the debt we owe her in her contribution to helping us bring down Wen Ruohan.” Neither of them say anything after that. Jin Zixun had long left, halfway through the conversation. Jiang Cheng hopes he had heard enough to know that he nor his sect were not allowed to harm Wen Qing or her relatives.

On the edge of his consciousness, he can hear the soft strumming of a guqin being played and a gentle voice calling out his birth name. He hears Shijie’s voice mingling with Wen Qing’s, soft and worried mixed with calm and crisp. He hears a third voice as well, filled with a familiar anger and harshness but not absent of worry.

Oh...how could I forget. I probably made everyone worry about me by running off like that and only leaving a note. And of course Jiang Cheng would be angry...

He peels open his eyes a crack, allowing light to flood in and he squints as his eyes adjust to it. Next to him, he hears movement.

“A-Xian.”

“Shijie...” Wei WuXian’s throat is dry from lack of use. He allows his eyes to open fully now so he can see his sister sitting on the bed next to him

“You’re finally awake.” This was Wen Qing’s voice.

“How long...” He murmurs.

“Six days,” Shijie answers him, taking his hand into hers.

Six? Last time it was only three...

“You used up a dangerous amount of spiritual energy. You shouldn’t have been so reckless to run off like that either.” There’s a warning in both her voice and her eyes. He doesn’t respond.

No one knows about my missing core except for Jiang Cheng, Wen Qing and Wen Ning.

“Second Master Lan has come every day to play his guqin for you,” Shijie explains. “If it weren’t for him, we’re afraid you wouldn’t have woken up so soon. Wen Qing herself wasn’t sure when you’d wake up.” Her hand squeezes his as she says this. Lan Wangji had stood up from the table he sat at and was lingering near the bedside, his eyes fixed on Wei WuXian, but saying nothing to disturb the current conversation.

“I made you worry,” He murmurs.

“We were *all* worried. A-Cheng was too...though,” Shijie pauses. “He was upset about you running off like that.”

“He has the right to be upset,” Wen Qing huffs as she helps Wei WuXian sit up and checks on his pulse. “Running to Nightless City like that is a suicide mission. Especially without backup. How in the world did you do it?”

“There was a spy there,” Wei WuXian says. “Meng Yao...he was a member of the Nie sect. He was the one who gave Zewu-jun the map.”

“I remember him,” Shijie says. “He was with Huaishang during the lecture, but he left shortly after because he wasn’t a disciple. I heard that he was the one who dealt the final blow against Wen Ruohan.”

“He helped me...or we helped one another. We may as well be close friends now...going through life and death together,” Wei WuXian laughs nervously at this. It felt so *weird* saying that, considering what had happened in the past timeline. But he had to keep pushing this goal forward. If he could befriend Jin Guangyao, they could even work to bring Jin Guangshan down together. However, he didn’t miss the way Lan Wangji’s eyes narrowed and his shoulders stiffened.

Have I made you jealous? Oh you fuddy-duddy, you should know you’re the only one for me.

“Wei-Xiong!” A loud familiar voice comes from outside. Wen Qing makes an irritated noise and goes to open the door.

“Young Master Nie, please keep your voice down. Wei WuXian has only just woken up. That being said, he shouldn’t have that many visitors. Please come back another day.”

“Wen Qing, I’m fine,” Wei WuXian protests.

“Three more days of rest is needed,” Lan Wangji tells him in a firm voice.

“Lan Zhaann,” Wei WuXian whines. “Nothing’s going to happen to me if I get visitors. Come onn.”

“As your doctor, *I* will be the one to decide that,” Wen Qing says sharply. “No more than two visitors at a time, understand? And I *will* know if you broke this rule. I’ll be going now. Sect leader Jiang said he found Wen Ning.”

“What about the rest of your family?”

“Wen Ning only managed to find a few of them. We don’t know where the rest are,” Wen Qing replies.

The labor camps...or they are imprisoned somewhere , Wei WuXian thinks. I’ll have to tell Jiang Cheng about that.

“We’ll find everyone, I promise,” Wei WuXian tells her.

“I really hope you can,” Wen Qing says, her voice weary. Shijie takes her hand.

“My brothers and I will do whatever we can for you. I will try to convince the Jin sect.”

“Pea-, Jin Zixuan will listen to you.” Wei WuXian nods. “He wouldn’t hurt innocent Wens.”
Unlike his father.

“I thought you didn’t like him.” Wen Qing raises her eyebrows at him. Shijie tilts her head as if she is surprised too.

“I never said he was a bad *person* ...we all saw how he stood up to Wen Chao for MianMian. He wouldn’t stand by and let innocent people get hurt. And if he knows you and your brother saved me, Shijie and Jiang Cheng, he wouldn’t let you be harmed. Moreover...the Dafan Wens never played a hand in the war. He should know this too.”

“I see.” Wen Qing nods. “I will trust your word on it then.” She and Shijie both leave and Wei WuXian is left alone with Lan Wangji.

“I’ll play more music for you.” The man in white sits back down at the table with his guqin. Wei WuXian sits back onto the bed with his legs crossed in a lotus position and he closes his eyes as he begins to meditate, concentrating on the soft strumming of the guqin. He doesn’t know how long he sat there, but eventually he starts shifting and twisting his wrists around.

“Lan Zhan, I’m fine now,” He says.

“Three more days are needed,” Lan Wangji insists as he walks over to him. Wei WuXian meets his eyes confidently this time without looking away.

“Lan Zhan, listen, I know you’re just worried about me. I’ve only spent too much spiritual energy and,” He pauses to put his hand up to his chest. “Well..and my new form of cultivation...”

“It is harmful to your mind and body,” Lan Wangji finishes the line for him.

“I know,” Wei WuXian replies.

“Then why continue using it?” The stubbornness and desperation in his voice that Wei WuXian had mistakenly regarded as resentment had an undertone of worry to it, one that Wei WuXian hadn’t paid close enough attention to before.

“If I had a choice,” Wei WuXian says slowly. “I wouldn’t use it. But I have no other path to walk down right now. I have to help Jiang Cheng rebuild the sect. What other means can I use if not the power in my hands right now?”

“I know Wei Ying is not evil,” Lan Wangji says softly. “But will you let me help you?”

“Lan Zhan,” Wei WuXian begins, but just then the door opens and Jiang Cheng steps into the room and they break their eyes away from one another.

“Second Master Lan, your brother is asking to see you,” Jiang Cheng says briskly after they exchange respectful bows. Lan Wangji nods, narrowing his eyes slightly as he notes the thunderous expression on Jiang Cheng’s face, and after an extended look at Wei WuXian, he leaves the room.

Wei WuXian sighs and his eyes darted nervously to Jiang Cheng, whose face looked dark as a storm. Neither of them speak for a long time.

“You can explain yourself first.” Jiang Cheng breaks the tension, crossing his arms over his chest and leaning against the doorway.

“Uh well,” Wei WuXian begins, scratching his nose nervously.

“Speak clearly and don’t try to evade any details.”

“Fine, alright,” Wei WuXian says wearily, sitting back down on the bed. He had expected to give Jiang Cheng an explanation either way, though the fact that Jiang Cheng was calm made him even more nervous.

“Sit down first, then we can talk.”

Chapter 6

Jiang Cheng manages to keep himself quiet until Wei WuXian is finished explaining. However he is still not satisfied with the reasoning Wei WuXian had given. In fact he is still angry that Wei WuXian had left with no warning and he had only left a *fucking note* to inform Jiang Cheng where he had gone. Still, he holds back from smacking his brother in the shoulders and considers the fact that he had just recovered. Instead, he lets his emotions out by making Zidian spark and crackle ever so slightly.

“Don’t ever run off like that again without telling anyone!” Jiang Cheng snaps the second Wei WuXian finishes talking. “Do you have any idea what excuse I had to say to the other sect leaders? I can’t simply tell them that my head disciple ran off without orders. *And*,” Jiang Cheng continues before Wei WuXian can answer. “You made everybody worry, especially A-jie.”

Wei WuXian sighs. “I know...I’m sorry I didn’t tell you. But I wanted to end things quickly. Following Nie Mingjue was the only way to get into the palace.”

“We promised we’d work together!” Jiang Cheng snaps. “Don’t try playing the hero by yourself again. If we’re going to do this, we have to cooperate with one another. I told you the other night and you still ran off.”

“Look at you lecturing me again. I almost missed it.”

Jiang Cheng glares at him, unamused.

This is our only chance to make things right. Not just for the people we lost but for us too. It was their only chance to become...brothers again. And to actually be the Twin Prides of Yunmeng...

Did you only go inside to find Jin Guangyao?” Jiang Cheng demands, irritated.

“No...I also wanted to destroy the Yin iron of course. I don’t know what method the sects used last time, but by using the amulet, I managed to weaken its power significantly as Wen Ruohan was still using it. It was a lot more effective. And I prevented Nie Minjue’s men from being killed and himself from being injured,” Wei WuXian explains.

“His qi deviation was worsened by Jin Guangyao in the past, but even in this timeline, it isn’t inevitable,” Jiang Cheng says quietly. “Every Nie sect leader was known to have gone through it.”

“I’m sure Wen Qing can help with that,” Wei WuXian points out.

“Right, anyways, what was your goal when you sought out Jin Guangyao?”

“To show that I am an ally and I am someone who he can trust and rely on. Besides, if I can become his friend...well, maybe it will be beneficial. We didn’t have a lot of interaction

during lectures. And we now have the knowledge of why he was kicked out of the Nie sect in the first place.” Jiang Cheng raises his eyebrows at this.

“He killed a general, that’s why. And he also freed Xue Yang. That’s why I want to ask you this. Can you trust *him* ? Especially when he knows about the amulet. How do you know he won’t tell his father again?”

“For now, I can. As long as Jin Guangshan doesn’t get the chance to manipulate him, he won’t have to descend into the path of evil like he did in the past. And Meng Yao has no reason to tell. That amulet was the reason we were able to work together and kill Wen Ruohan.” Wei WuXian answers. Jiang Cheng raises his eyebrows at him

I hope you haven’t forgotten what kind of person Jin Guangyao is,” Jiang Cheng says dryly. His brother sounded way too confident and overconfidence could lead to serious consequences.

“Of course not,” Wei WuXian says evenly. “But my point is, we’ve established a bond that we didn’t have last time. He won’t expose my weapon so casually.”

“If you say so...,” Jiang Cheng replies, still skeptical.

“Besides last time I made a whole show with the Stygian Tiger Amulet in front of everyone,” Wei WuXian continues. “That was why Jin Guangshan learned about it in the first place. Right now, the only other people who know about it are you, Wen Qing, Lan Zhan and Shijie. And Jin Guangyao. The entire cultivation world hasn’t seen what my amulet has done. Even while chasing out the Wens, I was being careful not to expose it.”

“Is it so easy to change what he becomes? He had already been affected by Jin Guangshan’s abuse in the past.” Jiang Cheng knew from that night in Guanyin Temple that Jin Guangyao had been kicked down Carp Tower by his own father. At the time, he had almost felt sympathy for him but it had quickly been overwhelmed by anger and resentment.

“Meng Yao spent too many years trying to get his father’s love and approval and committed multiple atrocities because of it,” Wei WuXian says quietly as if he shared Jiang Cheng’s thoughts.

“What he didn’t realize was that there were already people all around him that loved him sincerely. He didn’t need to go so far for someone who never would have seen him as a son or his family no matter what he did. By the time he realized that and had his father killed, there was no going back for him.”

“Zewu-jun loved him,” Jiang Cheng says slowly. “They were very close, the two of them. Especially after the death of Nie Mingjue.”

“Except Jin Guangyao had him killed under Jin Guangshan’s orders too.”

“The root of the problem is Jin Guangshan, we’ve already established that. How we...deal with him is something we still need to discuss,” Jiang Cheng says while lowering his voice. “Honestly,” Jiang Cheng continues with a huff. “We can’t stop Jin Guangshan from being

greedy for the amulet. We just need to have him expose that greediness in front of the other sect leaders.”

“And his war crimes against the Wen civilians,” Wei WuXian adds. “I know you found Wen Qing’s family but there are most likely others who have already been captured by Nie or Jin disciples.”

“I’m not sure if we can do anything about them, but we can’t figure all of it out now,” Jiang Cheng says firmly. “Jin Guangshan may still hold an investigation for the last piece of the Yin Iron.”

“Let him demand the amulet all he wants,” Wei WuXia snorts. “It will only show the other sects that he’s greedy for power. Life imprisonment would be good enough for that man as long as he doesn’t bother us,” Wei WuXian snickers. Jiang Cheng snorts. To him, imprisonment would be far too comfortable of a punishment for someone like Jin Guangshan who had been no less greedy for power than Wen Ruohan.

“Anyways, Xue Yang has the last piece. It’s how they were able to create another amulet, though it was a lot weaker than mine.”

“So we’ll have to track down Xue Yang too then?”

“We need a way to find Xiao Xingchen and Song Lan again and stop Xue Yang from killing them.”

“We can’t save *everyone*,” Jiang Cheng says exasperated as he pinches the bridge of the nose with his finger. “When I meant ‘everyone’, I only meant the people close to us.”

“We don’t need to *try* and save everyone. We just need to prevent the events that lead up to it. Once we detain Xue Yang, we can prevent more than one disaster.”

“Right,” Jiang Cheng mutters. Personally, he only cared about saving his sister and Jin Zixuan and if the array had sent them back further, they could have been able to save his parents too, but Nie Huaisang had been the one to make the array, so there was no way of changing how far back the array was meant to send them. He also remembered that the Wens were the reason Wei WuXian had walked away from him, so he had to agree to save them too.

Saving A-jie and Jin Zixuan is important, but I want to save my brother too...

“Now about the Wens,” Jiang Cheng says. “The Nie sect already knows I’ll be taking custody of the Dafan Wens, Wen Qing’s family specifically. Once they realize there aren’t cultivators, they will be fine with it.”

“The Nie and Lan may be fine with it, but not the Jins.” Wei WuXian frowns.

“I’m simply taking responsibility for them. Jin Guangshan won’t care. I’ll be making things easier for him by taking them off his hands.”

“Lan Wangji has been here a lot. I’m sure A-jie told you,” He says, deciding to change the subject. They couldn’t discuss more in full details, not here at least.

“He has. He had played music for me the entire time I was unconscious, like he did last time,” Wei WuXian murmurs. Jiang Cheng rolls his eyes, not in the mood to hear his brother moon over his future husband.

“Then will you be willing to go to Gusu with him this time and *let* him help you?” Jiang Cheng pushes himself off the wall to stand in front of Wei WuXian.

Wei WuXian bites his lip.

“Well, I wasn’t going to go unless I had your permission.”

“I was going to order you to go anyway.” Jiang Cheng crosses his arms again, rolling his eyes as Wei WuXian gapes at him.

“I’m telling you to go to Cloud Recesses as your brother, not as your sect leader. And A-jie would agree with me and make you go too,” Jiang Cheng adds as Wei WuXian tries to protest. He immediately snaps his mouth shut at the mention of their sister.

“And I can also ask Zewu-jun about courtship between you two.”

“Eh?!”

“Why are you surprised? You’re technically already married!”

“Wha-. no we’re not...I mean, we *are* , but uh well...” Jiang Cheng watches as Wei WuXian swallows before speaking again.

“I was going to wait until everything was over.”

Jiang Cheng stares at him. “What do you mean?”

“The future can still be unpredictable. We’ve changed things now so who knows how much could change in the future?”

“You want to wait? Haven’t you already waited long enough?” He swallows. “You made Lan Wangji wait thirteen years for your return. Will you make him go through that again?”

“It won’t be thirteen years this time.”

“Securing a marriage with the Lan sect will be beneficial. We will have more people standing beside us if we do have to make a move against Jin Guangshan,” Jiang Cheng says. “But we will wait until after we’ve rebuilt Lotus Pier.”

“Alright,” Wei WuXian sighs.

“A-jie’s coming with soup later. I’ll stay for lunch then I’ll have to speak with the other sect leaders about the Dafan Wens again. And also, Wen Qing says your bruises and cuts have

healed already, but you still need to rest in order to recover your spiritual energy. How are you feeling?”

“Fine, really. Nothing more than exhaustion. Were you worried about me?”

“As if!”

“I wish Mo Xuanyu’s core had come back with me to the past,” He sighs softly, his fingers brushing against where his core should be and Jiang Cheng can’t help but take a sharp intake of breath.

“There’ll be no soul-sacrificing ceremony,” Jiang Cheng says slowly.

Hopefully there won’t need to be.

“I don’t mind it,” Wei WuXian murmurs. “If we save Shijie and everyone, it would be worth the risk. It’s not like I haven’t been used to having no core.” Jiang Cheng flinches involuntarily at those words. *Right, he gave up his core to me so easily*, He thinks numbly. *He’ll never even regret it.*

““Used to it”?” He begins. “Why would you say something like that?” He snaps harshly. Wei WuXian opens his mouth to respond but the sound of the door opening makes Jiang Cheng turn his head.

“Boys, are you two playing nice?” A-jie enters the room holding a basket.

“Of course,” Wei WuXian says calmly. “We were just talking.” Jiang Cheng shoots him a warning glance, but Wei WuXian keeps his eyes focused on his sister who was filling three bowls with soup.

“Come over to eat, both of you. A-Cheng, you have a meeting later. You should make sure you have your energy before going.” Wei WuXian sits down first and immediately spoons soup into his mouth from his bowl

“Shijie’s soup is the best as always!” Wei WuXian says with a sigh. Jiang Cheng sits down next to him and he can see Wei WuXian’s eyes tearing up as he tastes the soup he hadn’t been able to eat again in over thirteen years.

“A-Xian?”

“It’s nothing,” Wei WuXian says quickly. “It’s just been one day too many since I’ve had your soup. I was craving it so much.”

Jiang Cheng can’t blame him because he was tearing up as well. He had spent months trying to perfect his sister’s soup, following the recipe step by step and making it the same way she had so Jin Ling could get to taste the same flavor he had cherished so much when his mother was alive. But it had never been the same. How could it be the same when something so important was missing?

A-jie smiles and says nothing more as she watches her brothers eat and drinks a bowl of the soup herself. After lunch, A-jie leaves to find Wen Qing while Wei WuXian walks with Jiang Cheng to the entrance of the meeting tent.

“I’ll fill you in later. And don’t stay away from your room for too long. You still need to recover.” Jiang Cheng tells him and Wei WuXian nods in response. During the meeting, the discussion mainly centered about what to do with the remaining Wens. Much like last time, everyone agreed that the non-combat civilians and children would be watched closely while the cultivators who participated in the war would be dealt with just punishment and executions.

“My father has offered to watch over the Wens. Because we have the most soldiers who will be able to keep an eye on them,” Jin Zixuan says.

“They won’t harm anyone,” Jiang Cheng begins. “They’re mainly women and children after all.”

“There could be rebellions,” Jin Zixun says in a snide tone. “And we have to make sure that the Yin Iron isn’t among them or they may try to fight us again.”

“My brother destroyed three pieces of the Yin Iron. Wen Ruohan never got his hands on the fourth piece,” Jiang Cheng says sharply.

“If we want to find out where the fourth piece is,” Lan Xichen says smoothly. “We can simply do an investigation and the first step is to interrogate and question the remaining Wens.”

“If we want to investigate the Yin Iron, it should involve all of the sects,” Jiang Cheng suggests. “Perhaps we can send a few disciples from each sect to investigate? Or investigate it ourselves while we rebuild our sects.” This was his only chance, Jiang Cheng knows, to make it difficult for Jin Guangshan to try to get his hands on the amulet.

“Speaking of it...I heard Wei WuXian did some unusual cultivation to destroy the yin iron. Using a spiritual tool.”

Jiang Cheng tenses at Jin Zixun’s words. *So much for it being a secret. I should have known discretion wouldn’t have lasted long.*

“It was beneficial,” Jiang Cheng replies tartly. “If he can destroy three pieces, he can destroy the fourth piece as well once we find it.”

“He was in the palace with me, was he not?” Nie Mingjue inquires. “Wen Ruohan was going to attack me with resentful energy. Something countered it. Wei WuXian saved my life right there so I can be grateful to him for that.”

“It is too strange,” Jin Zixun continues on loudly. “What power could he possibly possess to be able to destroy something that was said to be indestructible?”

“What does it matter if it helped us win the war?” Jiang Cheng hardly keeps the irritation out of his voice. “Using such a power to defeat evil is only an asset to us, no matter who wields it. I trust my brother enough to not be manipulated and obsessed with it like Wen Ruohan was.” Jin Zixun narrows his eyes and opens his mouth to reply but Jin Zixuan cuts in.

“ZiXun, that’s enough. And Sect leader Jiang, of course we know Wei WuXian isn’t vulnerable to manipulation. It is better that such power is in the right hands and we should keep it as such.”

“Even if they’re wicked tricks?” Jin Zixun sneers.

“They’re not,” Jiang Cheng says coldly. “He uses the Lan sect music technique to assist in his cultivation. It’s not the wicked tricks that Wen Ruohan used. Must you make me repeat myself?”

He never liked Jin Zixun and he never would. In all honesty, he could hardly blame Su She for wanting to curse Jin Zixun; he wouldn’t even need Jin Guangyao tell him to do it. This man pissed off everyone, including him. Heck, he had even managed to piss off his *sister* of all people and it was in defense of Wei WuXian. Of course when he had heard the story, the Jins had twisted it to make it like Wei WuXian started the fight.

“Your brother is allowed to make any spiritual tool he wants, so long as he doesn’t use it for evil purposes,” Nie Mingjue says at last, making it clear that he no longer wanted to hear this argument continue. “I do not know what cultivation method he has created, but I can only hope he knows what he is doing.”

“I’ll make sure he does,” Jiang Cheng says, then leaves with a bow. Being cooped up inside that tent with so many high ranking people was making him suffocate, despite already having years of experience with being sect leader and attending Discussion Conferences. Perhaps, it was only Jin Zixun’s presence that had been the cause of it; he wouldn’t be surprised if it was.

~

“Nie-xiong, were you looking for me earlier?”

The man in gray jumps and turns around to face Wei WuXian.

“Somewhere privately,” was his reply and Wei WuXian follows in confusion as his friend hurries away to a more secluded area, far away from the tents.

“You activated the array, didn’t you?” Nie Huaisang speaks as soon as they find a place to sit under a tree. Wei WuXian stiffens. *How did he know?*

“I went looking for you when I couldn’t find you. The array was glowing. How did you find your way into my secret chamber, anyways, Wei-xiong?”

“I was looking for *you*,” Wei WuXian says calmly. “The door to one of the quarters was ajar so I went inside. It was one of your library and art collection rooms. There was another door near the back...it was meant to be hidden, wasn’t it? A secret room?”

“It was,” Nie Huaisang answers back, blinking slowly and for once not hiding his face behind his fan.

“Why did you leave it open? Did you mean for me to step inside the room and activate that array?” There was anger rising in his voice and he didn’t know why. Maybe because Nie Huaisang had deliberately dragged him into another one of his schemes.

“I didn’t mean for you to actually activate it. Not today at least. I was going to ask you,” Nie Huaisangs tells him.

“If the array had sent us back further,” Wei WuXian murmurs softly. “We would have been able to save Madam Yu and Uncle Jiang....”

“That would have consequences, would it not? You won the war by using Demonic Cultivation.”

“Crafty tricks,” Wei WuXian corrects him automatically.

“Yes,” Nie Huaisang nods. “What you went through in the Burial Mounds...you had no choice, didn’t you?”

So Huaisang knew?

“I knew the first time,” Nie Huaisang says as if he can read Wei WuXian’s thoughts. “I knew you went missing for three months with the Wens claiming they’d throw you into the Burial Mounds. I am surprised nobody else connected the dots.”

“You deliberately wanted me to activate the array. How come you came in after me then? Didn’t you want me to do the work for you?” Wei WuXian crosses his arms, narrowing his eyes.

“I can help keep an eye out for you. On Meng Yao especially. Wei-xiong, you are capable of many things, but do you think you can save everyone alone?”

“I’m not alone. Jiang Cheng is also here,” Wei WuXian says tartly. Nie Huaisang’s eyes widen with surprise and confusion.

“What? How? He wasn’t at Unclean Realm!”

“He wasn’t....I don’t know how it happened,” Wei WuXian says hastily. He wasn’t going to let slip about how Jiang Cheng had his golden core. No one else needed to know that, especially if it wasn’t necessary.

“So you’re working together then?” Nie Huaisang opens up his fan and begins fanning himself.

“We are...we’re trying,” Wei WuXian says.

“Was running away to Nightless City part of it?”

“No, that was just me...alone,” Wei WuXian says sheepishly. “I promised him it won’t happen again. He’d break my legs if it did.”

“Lan Wangji may be joining us very soon if the news has reached him by now,” Nie Huaisang says slowly.

“It’s been over a week...why wouldn’t it have?” *Even if Lan Zhan wanted to come after me...he couldn’t just leave his sect behind. Especially not when he is Chief Cultivator.*

Nie Huaisang doesn’t respond.

“You’ll have to ask him yourself.” Nie Huaisang gestures with his head to Wei WuXian’s side, making him turn. Lan Wangji was standing in the trees waiting for them.

“Lan Zhan,” Wei WuXian breathes. *I should tell him, but will he even believe me? What am I supposed to tell him? Everything?*

“Wei Ying, you should be resting.” He looks over at Nie Huaisang with a cold gaze which makes him hide his face behind his face in a hurry.

“I’ll let you two talk,” He says before running away. Wei WuXian sighs.

“Lan Zhan, there’s something I need to tell you.”

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

Please read ending notes carefully after this chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Is something wrong?” Lan Wangji’s eyes are locked onto his.

“Come here first and sit down in front of me,” Wei WuXian tells him. Lan Wangji frowns slightly but does so.

I don't know how else I'm going to tell you everything...

“Wei Ying,” Lan Wangji says, his eyes softening. His lips are slightly parted as if...oh..

The kiss.

Of course Lan Wangji wouldn't have forgotten.

Not to mention I disappeared the night after it happened.

“If I told you...that the future is unkind and cruel...especially for us, would you believe me?” There’s confusion on Lan Wangji’s face as well as thoughtfulness.

“Please elaborate.”

Something sticks in Wei WuXian’s throat, but he swallows it away.

“Come closer and put your hands over mine.”

“Empathy?” Lan Wangji’s eyebrows furrow.

“Ah Lan Zhan. It’s too much for me to say in words....but you should be prepared for what you’re about to see.”

“We need the Clarity Bell,” Lan Wangji says. “It is unsafe.” Wei WuXian sighs.

“Let me go find Jiang Cheng then. Or Huaisang.”

As he walks out from behind the tree, he’s surprised to see that Jiang Cheng is already there, looking at him with his arms crossed.

“Huaisang told me you were here. You better make this quick. What do you need?”

“I’m going to show Lan Wangji everything. Through empathy. I need the Clarity Bell.” Wei WuXian explains. “If you’re fine with that...”

“Why wouldn’t I be? Isn’t it important he knows?”

“We can’t tell too many people,” Wei WuXian warns.

“We’re not telling A-jie? Even though this involves her?” Jiang Cheng frowns.

“It involves a lot of people and some of them, we can’t tell,” Wei WuXian points out. “We can’t risk this information leaking into the wrong hands. And anyone else knowing could put them in danger. Lan Wangji and Nie Huaisang are more than enough to help us.”

“It wouldn’t put them in danger,” Jiang Cheng argues. “Wouldn’t it only keep them out of danger if they knew who to look out for? Besides...” Jiang Cheng looked away. “Keeping secrets only causes problems, I thought you’d know that by now.”

Wei WuXian flinches away at this. He was right, but the stakes are different this time.”

“ Think about it,” Jiang Cheng continues. “We can’t keep an eye on everyone all the time.

“Depends if they believe us and don’t think we’re possessed,” Wei WuXian retorts. “I can’t exactly perform Empathy on everyone.” He pauses. “If you wish to tell Shijie, you can. She will believe us for sure but anyone else, I do not know. The both of us should be the only ones trying ”

“Okay fine. I’ll ring the bell for you.”

Lan Wangji and Jiang Cheng exchange greetings briefly and then it was time to begin.

It took only a few seconds to enter Empathy. Because it was his memories, he carefully leaves out the scenes when he was in the Burial Mounds, the memories of the golden core transfer, and instead pouring most of his focus on the details of Qiongqi Path, the prison camps for the Wens, Jin Guangshan’s power hungry greed, the Wens turning themselves over, the massacre at Nightless City. He doesn’t leave out his death; he doesn’t know why, but he doesn’t. Wei WuXian feels guilty for *wanting* to show him, to make him relive the painful memory again. But at the same time, it was a necessary drive for determination. At least this time, the burden wouldn’t have to stay with him for thirteen years. He tightens his grip slightly when he feels Lan Wangji’s hand shake beneath his own and his breathing becoming uneven.

“Focus.” It’s Jiang Cheng’s voice. He must have sensed something was wrong too. Lan Wangji’s cultivation may be strong but Empathy could disturb the mind the same way. The most important focus was what happened in Guanyin Temple. Wei WuXian feeds every last detail to Lan Wangji about the exposure of Jin Guangyao’s crimes. When the ringing of the Clarity Bell finally pulls them out of Empathy, he can feel beads of sweat from his forehead. Looking up, it was the first time he had seen Lan Wangji so shaken, even if it was barely noticeable. Jiang Cheng noticeably steps a few feet away to give them space.

“Wei Ying,” Lan Wangji begins but can’t seem to bring himself to say more.

“I’ve already lived that future once before,” Wei WuXian explains in a quiet voice. “Now we’ve both seen it. And,” Wei WuXian glances over at Jiang Cheng who’s leaning against a nearby tree, his head slightly tilted towards them to listen.

“Jiang Cheng got sent back with me. I don’t know why...but it’s not something we need to worry about.” Even as Wei WuXian says this, he can see Lan Wangji tightening its grip on Bichen and his cold stare towards Jiang Cheng.

“Lan Zhan.” Wei WuXian keeps a hand on his arm. He knows neither Lan Wangji nor Jiang Cheng got along well together after he’d come back as Mo Xuanyu. He didn’t know what interactions had occurred between them when he was dead and he hadn’t asked, but he can only imagine it had been full of hostility and blame. Moreover, the memories he had shown Lan Wangji had been his own. Though Wei WuXian never blamed him, Lan Wangji had now witnessed the reason why Wei WuXian had let go of his hand on the cliff that night.

“I’m going back to camp. A-jie will be wondering where we are, so don’t take long,” Jiang Cheng says to Wei WuXian without looking at Lan Wangji as he pushes himself off the tree.

“Wei Ying.” Lan Zhan is still looking after Jiang Cheng.

“He’s my brother. He’s not going to hurt me,” Wei WuXian swallows. “We’re going to save Shijie. We promised each other. We can make things work out.”

Lan Wangji lets go of the tension in his hand and simply nods.

“And Jin Guangyao?”

Wei WuXian smiles.

“Don’t worry. I have my plans for him. Nie-xiong will be an asset to us, but as it is more his style, he will be working more discreetly. I hope he will at least give us an account and not keep us in the dark.”

“And me? Does Wei Ying need me to do anything?”

“For the time being...there isn’t much to worry about. Jiang Cheng and I will have to deal with the political issues when Sect leader Jin starts asking about the Stygian Tiger Amulet. We can’t risk jeopardizing Shijie’s wedding with Jin Zixuan, so we have to be especially careful.”

“How do you plan on dealing with the amulet this time?”

“If there’s a way to destroy it safely, I have yet to figure it out. I broke it into pieces last time, but that was not enough to get rid of its power entirely, especially not when there was still another piece of Yin Iron with them.

“Xue Yang?” Lan Wangji frowns. Wei WuXian nods.

“Let’s go back now, Lan Zhan. Shijie will be looking for me. And Wen Qing will paralyze me with needles if I stay out for too long.”

“Mn.”

They walk back to the main residence section of Nightless City. Wen Qing immediately crosses the room to him the second he opens the door.

“Where have you been? You shouldn’t be wandering around after I just told you to rest!” She scolds.

“Aiya, Lady Wen. I just needed fresh air. Spare me just this once,” Wei WuXian whines as Wen Qing pushes him to the bed and sits down next to him to check his pulse.

“You needed fresh air? Then tell me why you were spotted wandering outside of camp with Young Master Nie?”

“Uhh well...I enjoy nature?” Wei WuXian says lamely.

“What good is it to have a doctor around when you won’t even listen?” Wen Qing snaps irritably. She turns away from Wei WuXian and to Lan Wangji instead.

“Second Master Lan, if you can do a favor for me, please make sure Young Master Wei rests well. You can continue to play your guqin for him. It’s been speeding up his recovery a lot, but he shouldn’t be exerting his energy too much. I don’t know what he did today, but his energy seems drained again.”

Wei WuXian swallows guiltily and gives Lan Wangji a sheepish look.

“I promise I’ll rest, Lan Zhan. But can you do me a favor and see if Meng Yao is around?”

Lan Wangji hesitates, a look of worry and uncertainty passing through his eyes.

“Trust me.”

“Mn.”

When Meng Yao arrives, he’s wearing the gold clad of the Jin sect and bears the vermillion mark on his forehead. They sit at the table and Wei WuXian pours them both tea.

He must have already been recognized by his father so he is ‘Jin Guangyao’ now.

“Young Master Wei, I see you’ve recovered,” Jin Guangyao greets him with a bow.

“Not fully, but I will be soon,” Wei WuXian says with a smile. “I see your father has accepted you into the sect. I should be addressing you as ‘Lianfeng-zun. Forgive me for my rudeness.” Wei WuXian bows deeply to him in return.

“Young Master Wei, there is no need. We are allies in war and I feel as if we have a close bond.” There’s hesitation in Jin Guangyao’s voice as he says this.

“I agree. We can be friends. You can address me as ‘Wei-xiong’ or ‘Wei WuXian’, whichever you prefer.” Wei WuXian says serenely. “May I call you ‘Jin-xiong’...if that is okay with you.”

Jin Guangyao looks stunned but he nods.

“I hope you weren’t injured when you were in the palace,” Wei WuXian asks. “I expect they treated you better than they did me.”

“I managed to gain his trust, so no, they did not treat me poorly. I apologize for not preventing them from injuring you,” Jin Guangyao says quietly. Wei WuXian tilts his head. He was not used to getting apologies from this man.

“Do not worry about it. We wouldn’t have worked out our plan otherwise. I have to thank you for getting Wen Ning out as well. How did you two know to trust one another?”

“I was wary of him at first, but I remember him being kind to me at Cloud Recesses. From my small conversations with him, I can tell he was very different from Wen Chao and Wen Xu,” Jin Guangyao replies simply.

“Your father...I heard he is asking about my amulet,” Wei WuXian says. It wasn’t the whole truth of course, but he had no other way of proving how he knew about Jin Guangshan’s motive. Besides, Jiang Cheng had told him earlier that Jin Zixun found out, so the news would have spread to Jin Guangshan as well.

“He did ask me,” Jin Guangyao replies. “He knew I was with you in the palace.” Wei WuXian sucks in a breath.

“But rest assured, I haven’t told him it was in your possession. I didn’t want to...get you in trouble.” Jin Guangyao says hurriedly, then he pauses and gives Wei WuXian a curious look. “But Young Master Wei, may I ask why you’re in possession of such a weapon? And how did you come across it?”

“Ah.” Wei WuXian smiles. “I simply needed to craft a tool to counter Wen Ruohan’s Yin Iron. And I just happen to come across a very interesting sword after taking down the Tortoise of Slaughter with Lan Zhan.”

“I see.” Jin Guangyao blinks slowly at him.

“I am aware that such powers shouldn’t be in any one person’s hand. We do not need another Wen Ruohan, so in due time, I will get rid of it. Tell me...did Sect leader Jin ask for it because he desires this power?”

Jin Guangyao looks taken aback by this question, which made Wei WuXian make a mental note to himself to not overstep and say too much.

“I do not know why Father would want it,” he answers slowly. “He is simply concerned that it is related to the Yin Iron and doesn’t wish for it to be used for evil again.”

“We all share his concerns,” Wei WuXian replies calmly. “That is why I want to destroy it as soon as possible. I do not want it falling into the wrong hands.”

“Do you think it is safe in your hands then?” Jin Guangyao asks.

“I created it but...I do not know its full potential,” Wei WuXian admits. “However, I know more than enough about it. Others may not. At least, I will trust in myself not to use it for my own ambitions. I only wished to use it to win the war and bring revenge to my sect so they and all other lives who’ve been lost can rest in peace. Now that the war is over, I do not need to keep such a dangerous weapon around.”

“I see. That is for the best. There’s a lot of dark energy in that amulet after all,” Jin Guangyao agrees.

“Anyways, tell me about how life in Carp Tower is faring for you. Have you settled down well?”

A hard line sets across Jin Guangyao’s face, but it’s replaced so quickly by a dimpled smile that Wei WuXian barely catches it.

“Your father never treated you well in the past, did he?” Wei WuXian asks slowly. “He...kicked you out.” It’s a sensitive topic that he’s treading on and he’s watching carefully for Jin Guangyao’s reaction. Surely enough, a flash of something crosses his eyes.

“He’s accepted me now,” Jin Guangyao says tightly, but there’s hesitation and uncertainty in his voice.. Wei WuXian sighs.

“And I know you’ll do whatever it takes to prove yourself to him. Anyone would, I assume,” Wei WuXian muses. Jin Guangyao doesn’t reply.

“If we spend our entire lives trying to satisfy someone else, what about ourselves? What are we doing for ourselves?”

“I’m not sure what you mean.” Jin Guangyao tilts his head.

“What I want to say is.” Wei WuXian meets his eye. “We need to live for ourselves and not just for others. If our only purpose is to obey others, we will end up losing ourselves in the process. When you were serving under Wen Ruohan, did you ever lose sight of yourself and your true purpose there? Especially when serving someone who did so many evil deeds.”

“No. I wanted to help everyone...especially Zewu-jun and-,” He breaks off, looking embarrassed.

“I..I just did what anyone should have done to eradicate evil.”

“I just want to tell you that no matter what anyone, your Father or your superiors, tells you to do, you’ll be able to judge whether it is right or wrong before doing it. It’s more important to trust in our hearts. As for approval from others, it doesn’t need to come from everyone. There are people who will truly value you and care about you regardless of your status. Don’t

Huaisang and Chifeng-Zun already regard you as someone talented and skilled? And Zewu-jun? And you've definitely impressed me after you killed Wen Ruohan."

Freeing Xue Yang though...that was not as heroic.

"The late Jiang Fengmian took you in as his own son. Even though you were a son of a servant, right?" Jin Guangyao looks up at him carefully. There's a hint of envy in his voice. It seems almost familiar and in that moment, he realizes the slight similarities between his own brother and Jin Guangyao. They both wanted their father's approval and love.

"He did," Wei WuXian replies calmly. "I know I didn't need to do much to be accepted into the sect, but the same can't be said for everyone. However, I'm sure you will be able to find a friend within the sect. Your brother perhaps?"

"Jin Zixuan?" Jin Guangyao looks uncertain. "But I-,"

"He may be arrogant at times," Wei WuXian admits. "But he is a good person. And the lady he's always with, MianMian. She is also friendly. You should talk to her." He stops and frowns. "But I'd avoid Jin Zixun. Forgive me for saying this, but he doesn't seem too likely to be friends with anyone." At this, Jin Guangyao hides a laugh behind a sleeve, something Wei WuXian had only seen when he was at Cloud Recesses.

This was still Meng Yao and not the Jin Guangyao that manipulated the entire cultivation world. He still has a chance.

"He is difficult to talk with. You are right...Young Master Jin is indeed friendly. He was one of the first to welcome me in...genuinely at least."

"He is someone you can trust," Wei WuXian reassures him.

"Do you think my father is an untrustworthy person?"

"What makes you think that?" Wei WuXian swallows, but keeps his voice steady.

"You seem wary of him," Jin Guangyao replies calmly.

"I just don't feel comfortable about him asking about the amulet," Wei WuXian says quietly. "Forgive me for imposing, but I believe the Jin sect is the most powerful of the sects now. Would it surprise you if he wanted the amulet for himself?"

"No."

"And you say he's accepted you now, but how can you know for sure? What father would treat his son in such a manner in the past if he truly cared for you? If it was me, it'd be hard for me to forgive them, even if it was my father. As I said before...just remember those who care about you."

"Wei-xiong, haven't you heard the saying, 'Keep your friends close, but keep your enemies closer?'" Jin Guangyao smiles at him. Wei WuXian's lips curl into a smirk.

“Of course.”

“Then I believe we have an understanding of my motives.”

You couldn't have said that earlier? Wei WuXian thinks, amused.

He wanted to take down Jin Guangshan, of course, but he needed it do it *right* and not with a random murder scheme. In the past, Jin Guangyao already held resentment for his father, but had committed so many crimes just to please him. Perhaps this time, it wouldn't be such a great idea to work together with the man to bring down his father.

Chapter End Notes

So, the main reason this chapter is kind of late is because I took a long time planning out that convo between JGY and WWX. I need to know people's thoughts on it so feedback would be helpful. I just need some overall feedback on the dialogue and whether or not the flow was good. That being said, I might go back and make some minor edits if necessary.

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Ending on another cliffhanger tonight since I wanted a chapter up, but didn't want to rush the convo between JC & WWX. I need to think on it still.

Also, after that mess up I did on Chapter 8 for 'Rewrite the stars', I DID post a brand new chapter. Just wanted to point that out in case anyone didn't notice. I still feel stupid for doing a mistake like that :")) but at least it was just one chapter?? haha

Hope you enjoy this chapter and look forward to more!

After leaving the room, Jiang Cheng opts to check on the Wens who had been brought in by him. Other than caring for the injured cultivators, Wen Qing stays with her family to check on their conditions and health. They'd been moved into the guest quarters where the rest of the Jiang disciples were staying upon Jiang Cheng's request. He doesn't remember much about Wen Qing's family from when he had seen them in the Burial Mounds, but they definitely seemed to be in better condition now.

Because they hadn't been starved and beaten at the labor camps. Jiang Cheng thinks, shuddering.

“Qing-jie, who is that? Is he a bad man?” A small voice from the other side of the tent. A small boy sits on Wen Qing's lap, pressing his face close to Wen Qing's chest.

A-Yuan . Wen Yuan.

“He's not a bad man,” Wen Qing tells him in a soothing voice. “He is helping us.”

Jiang Cheng can't bring himself to meet her eye. He had hardly been able to ever since Wei WuXian first brought her back to the camp. He had tried to slow the quickening of his breath every time he caught sight of her.

After thirteen years, he had tried not to think of her. He'd only had feelings of resentment and hatred towards Wei WuXian who had abandoned him for the Wens and caused his sister and Jin Zixuan to die because of it. But now, as she sits in front of her, a toddler on her arms, something shifts inside him, a feeling he hasn't felt ever since his teenage years.

No, He tells himself. *I don't have any right to...not when...*

She had died. She and her family had died at the hands of the Jins. They had died an unnecessary death simply because Jin Guangshan had decided that they should be executed for the crimes of their relatives despite doing nothing wrong themselves. Even when he had ran to Carp Tower after hearing news of her turning herself in to Jin Guangshan, he still hadn't been able to meet her eye. She had looked at him briefly, her face expressionless before she had continued up the stairs to meet her fate. He hadn't done *anything*. He hadn't been *able* to do anything. Over the years, a wooden comb had sat in a locked box, ownerless, for it will never get a new one or could return to its original owner

"No, I am not a bad man," Jiang Cheng hesitantly rests his hand on the boy's head. A-Yuan...he had been left an orphan just like Jin Ling with only one father figure to care for him. That had also been the fault of the Jins.

"In a few days, we'll be going to my home."

"What about my home?" The young boy asks in a small voice. "With my Mama, Baba, and Jiejie? Why can't we go there?"

Jiang Cheng exchanges a look with Wen Qing whose eyes reflect only sorrow. Jiang Cheng swallows.

We couldn't save A-Yuan's parents after all...

"We're going to a new home, A-Yuan," Wen Qing says softly.

"You'll have lots of shidis and shimeis to play with," Jiang Cheng tells him. *He would if I rebuilt the sect. And I will. I've done it before and I can do it again. This time, with Wei WuXian by my side.*

Wen Qing hands Wen Yuan over to his grandmother to take him for his nap and Jiang Cheng is left alone with Wen Qing in the tent.

"Sect leader Jiang, how are so sure the sects will let us go? Many of the minor sects may still want us to pay for our crimes as well as the Jins."

"As far as they've been told, we're simply taking responsibility for you and your family, whether it be as prisoners or labor workers. But," He says quickly, noticing the tension in Wen Qing's shoulders.

"As soon as you arrive at Lotus Pier, it will be under my jurisdiction on how to treat you. You won't be treated unfairly, I promise. My disciples will not stoop to abusing anyone behind my back."

Unlike the Jins.

"If you'd like us to help rebuild...we'd be willing to," Wen Qing says quietly. "It's the least we can do in exchange for your hospitality and after what my relatives did." Jiang Cheng steadies his breath and finally brings himself to meet her eye.

“Your relatives didn’t kill anyone. The ones who did are dead. My brother and I have gotten the revenge we wanted for our parents.”

“I see.” Wen Qing nods.

“And I’m sure you and your family are happy as well. Wen Ruohan has been a thorn in your side, hasn’t he?”

“Yes,” Wen Qing replies. “My branch of the Wens simply wanted to live out our lives doing what we do best, which is saving people...but when the war started...we were called to arms and children were threatened if the men didn’t comply...so I’m sorry, Sect leader Jiang. My family isn’t completely guilt free.”

“It was against your will,” Jiang Cheng says briskly. “The intentions in your heart were clear as well as your conscience. That is enough for me.”

“Thank you for saying that.” Wen Qing bows to him. “I can only hope the other sects will cooperate. I heard that Jin Guangshan found out about...Wei WuXian’s amulet.”

“I...I know he will ask about it,” Jiang Cheng says. “I will find a way to make sure he doesn’t find a way to...accuse us of anything.”

“You do not trust him.” Wen Qing’s eyes meet his and Jiang Cheng struggles to hold his gaze steady with hers and not move it away.”

“No.”

“Why?”

“I have my reasons,” Jiang Cheng says, wracking his brain to come up with *something*. “I do not know why he has such a sudden interest in my brother’s spiritual tool, but it can’t be good. And I highly doubt it is because he is concerned for my brother’s health. The Jin sect has the strongest standing in the cultivation world right now and they’ll see my brother as a threat to that.”

“You surprised me with your intuition, Sect leader Jiang. You managed to pick up on this even though you haven’t officially succeeded as sect leader and have only led the sect for a couple of months.”

“It’s...,” Jiang Cheng doesn’t know what to say next. “We don’t want another Wen Ruohan. I know Jin Guangshan is a man of ambition so I want to be cautious”

“That is fair.” Wen Qing nods.

“I’m going to look for my sister,” Jiang Cheng says hastily, suddenly feeling as if the tent was closing in around him. He’s standing too close to her and he had felt his heart quickening as time passed. Seeing her again, alive and talking to her as if they were not hostile towards one another was strong. He thought he’d never get that chance again. She had given him the comb back in the previous timeline. But right now she still has it. This time, Jiang Cheng wants her to keep it. He had promised her protection along with her family and he’d made

sure he wouldn't break it again. This time, he wouldn't let himself be taken advantage of for being a young and inexperienced sect leader and would stand up for the innocent Wens.

For him, unbeknownst to others, he had technically already had over thirteen years of experience of leading a sect. Even if his sect was in a set of ruins again, he wouldn't let the other sects walk all over him. He would find the strength and courage to stand up for himself and for the Wens.

He goes to find his sister who'd been spending the past few days before and after the war had ended at the medical hunt, tending to the injured with Wen Qing. After Wei Wuxian returned from the war, it had been Wen Qing who'd convinced her to leave Wei Wuxian's bedside so she could find something to keep herself occupied with and that she could visit every few hours. A-jie had only accepted because they both trusted Wen Qing and Lan Wangji to take care of Wei Wuxian in their absence.

"A-jie, how are things going?" Jiang Cheng looks around the medical tent, which was more vacant for the first time since the war started.

"There isn't much for me to do anymore," A-jie tells him. "We'll be able to go home soon...to Lotus Pier."

"Yes," Jiang Cheng agrees softly. *He would finally go home. Together with his brother and sister. Something he hadn't done in so long that it hurt even to think about.*

"Sect leader Jin is hosting a banquet tomorrow night. Is A-Xian well enough to attend?"

"He should be fine, but I'll have Wen Qing check on him beforehand," Jiang Cheng tells her.

When Jiang Cheng circles back towards Wei WuXian's room, he double-takes as he sees Jin Guangyao leaving it. He quickens his footsteps, suddenly anxious, and enters the room without knocking. Wei WuXian's sitting on the bed in a lotus position and his eyes closed as he meditates. Seeing his brother safe immediately makes him relax, though he didn't open his eyes when Jiang Cheng entered so he closes the door silently and looks around the room. Two used cups sit at the table.

Why has Jin Guangyao been here? Did Wei WuXian invite him here to talk?

"Jiang Cheng? I thought you were busy." Wei WuXian's voice turns his attention back to the bed.

"Why was Jin Guangyao here?" Jiang Cheng gets straight to the point.

"We had a talk, that's all. I'm supposed to be trying to build a bond with him," Wei WuXian replies. His lips curl into an uncertain smile.

"I don't like this," Jiang Cheng says through gritted teeth.

"Don't like what?"

"How are you so comfortable with him?" Jiang Cheng demands. Wei WuXian's smile falters.

“I’m not,” He says quietly. “I’m trying my best, but it isn’t easy. Would it be easy for you?”

Jiang Cheng lets out a slow breath. He had barely managed to stay calm in front of Jin Zixun’s presence. Seeing Jin Guangyao come out from his brother’s room had sent way too many thoughts through his head and not all of them were pleasant.

“You’ll be better at tolerating him than me. Let’s hope your charm works,” Jiang Cheng huffs at last.

“If they can work on Lan Zhan, then they can work on Jin Guangyao,” Wei WuXian says smugly.

“I don’t think it’s fair to compare them.” Jiang Cheng crosses his arms. “Oh and there’s going to be a banquet tomorrow night. Are you up for it?”

“Right now, I feel fine after meditating and I’ll be doing more of it tomorrow since Lan Zhan comes every day to play music for me now,” Wei WuXian says. “But I’d check with Wen Qing or she’ll get mad again.” Wei WuXian rolled his eyes. “How are Wen Ning and Wen Qing by the way? And the rest of her family?”

“They’re doing well. My disciples have stayed close to them. To make sure nobody tries to...abuse them.”

“They wouldn’t dare do that with Chifeng-zun around.” Wei WuXian narrows his eyes. “Right?”

“The Nies wouldn’t do it. The Lans have more discipline than to do anything like that,” Jiang Cheng says.

“Everything is the Jins,” Wei WuXian mutters. Jiang Cheng only scoffs in agreement.

“We need to stay on Jin Zixuan’s side though. I’m sure he can be an ally...more so than Jin Guangyao.”

“I agree with that. But if things go well on my end, then Jin Guangyao can also be an asset to us. Especially if we want to bring down Jin Guangshan,” Wei WuXian points out.

“We’ll do it the *proper* way though,” Jiang Cheng says firmly. “I can’t say I trust Jin Guangyao to not poison his father.”

“He wouldn’t be that reckless, you should know that. If something went wrong in Carp Tower, he would be the first to be blamed.”

“Whatever you say.” Jiang Cheng narrows his eyes at Wei Wuxian. “I don’t like him being around you, but I hope you know what you’re doing.”

“I do. Really. I won’t make the same mistakes I did last time. I *can’t* even risk it,” Wei WuXian says firmly.

Neither can I. Jiang Cheng thinks

“However much I don’t like Peacock.” Wei Wuxian wrinkles his nose. “We still need Jin Ling to be born, don’t we?”

“Right,” Jiang Cheng agrees. “We can’t interfere with A-jie and Jin Zixuan. If nothing else interferes, it should happen like the last time.”

“Not sure if I can stand by and let him insult her though,” Wei Wuxian mutters.

“Wei Wu *xian*. ”

“I *did* interfere last time and that’s how he confessed in the first place,” Wei Wuxian argues. “You...just didn’t see what happened.”

“Then tell me.”

“It was during the Phoenix Mountain Hunt. I had just bumped into Lan Zhan and well, we saw Peacock and Shijie. I heard him saying some harsh words to her so I intervened. Then later Jin Zixun came and was sprouting nonsense about how I broke the rules by hunting too much prey.”

At this, both Jiang Cheng and Wei Wuxian snort in disbelief. Wei Wuxian continues,

He accused me of cheating because I studied wicked tricks and that...” Wei Wuxian trails off, suddenly looking uncomfortable.

“Continue,” Jiang Cheng says calmly. Wei Wuxian takes a deep breath.

“He called me the ‘son of a servant’.” His voice is dry and he shrugs absentmindedly, but Jiang Cheng doesn’t miss the soft sigh he lets out. He feels the familiar anger burn inside his chest whenever someone insults one of his siblings.

“How dare he!” Jiang Cheng hisses out the words through clenched teeth.

“It’s fine, Jiang Cheng,” Wei Wuxian says, not meeting his eye. “I’m used to it. People always say it, don’t they?”

Jiang Cheng only gives him an incredulous look.

Most of the time, people had badmouthed Jiang Yanli which always led both him and Wei Wuxian to jump to her defense in anger. They had also, however, spoken about Wei Wuxian murmuring things about how Jiang Fengmian took in the son of a servant as his own and allowed him to stay close with the Jiang sect heir and his sister. These comments had equally angered Jiang Cheng and A-jie who considered Wei Wuxian as their brother throughout the years as they grew up together, but they had never been allowed to acknowledge it. Not with Madam Yu around. And Wei Wuxian hadn’t allowed them to say anything in his defense either, knowing that it would only get them both in trouble. So they’d both been forced to sit silently, with Jiang Cheng clenching his fist with anger as they spoke behind his brother’s back.

Wei Wuxian had simply accepted and taken in the insults, not showing an expression on his face. Just like when Madam Yu had lashed out with him, emotionally and physically, with both her words and Zidian, he had simply taken it.

He always hides his pain from others rather than letting them help. Jiang Cheng thinks bitterly.

“You were the head disciple of the Jiang sect, *my* head disciple. He should have shown you respect,” Jiang Cheng snaps. “He’s got some nerve. Disrespecting you is the same as disrespecting me and the entire sect.”

“Jiang Cheng...,” Wei Wuxian says weakly, but he doesn’t continue.

Jiang Cheng calms himself down and tries not to think about Jin Zixun again. Then again, since when has Jin Zixun done that for anyone other than his close family?

“Sorry, go on,” Jiang Cheng mutters. He goes to sit down at the table instead and Wei Wuxian leaves the bed to join him.

“Shijie came and well she said that I was her brother,” Wei Wuxian continues, “and she told Jin Zixun to apologize to me. Eventually he did.”

Hearing this, Jiang Cheng feels satisfied.

“I wish I could have seen that,” Jiang Cheng scoffs. “Did A-jie tell him off? For real?” Wei Wuxian smiles.

“She was amazing. As she always is. I...I wish she didn’t have to do that though,” Wei Wuxian stares down at the floor again.

“What are you talking about?” Jiang Cheng says loudly. “You’re our brother. Do you think either of us will stand by and let someone insult you?”

We had in the past...but not anymore.

“Mother didn’t let us call you our brother in public,” Jiang Cheng continues through clenched teeth before Wei Wuxian can reply. “But it was the truth, wasn’t it? Your name is next to both mine and A-jie’s. You’re *family*. It’s official. It...it doesn’t matter what she thought of you or what other people say,” He finds himself saying. “You’re our brother and that’s that. People have to either respect that or they’ll be disrespecting our sect.”

“Jiang Cheng!” Wei Wuxian protests. “That’s not...”

“Not what?” Jiang Cheng crosses his arms.

““He never wanted me as a *son*. He only wanted me to be by your side. To support you as you grew to be the sect heir. He never wanted *me* as heir.”

Jiang Cheng tenses out of pure habit at these words.

*Oh.. **oh** ...so that's where this conversation is going huh?*

Chapter 9

“You were the heir. He never would have changed that. He *loved* you,” Wei Wuxian continues.

“I know that,” Jiang Cheng says, his voice suddenly small. “He loved all of us.”

Of course he knew that. Even if Wei Wuxian had been everything that would have been a perfect heir in his eyes. Even if he had been so much stricter on him than Wei Wuxian. It was one of the reasons his mother hated Wei Wuxian.

This had been a thought that had stuck with Jiang Cheng even after his parents’ death. The way people, especially his father, praised Wei Wuxian’s cultivation had always made him bitter and jealous. His mother’s beration of him hadn’t made things any better. Even after he had become sect leader, people whispered things about how the rising of his sect was only because of Wei Wuxian and it shook him with anger to the core. But it had been mixed with guilt and bitterness after the First Siege of the Burial Mounds. Even his death had brought upon Jiang Cheng’s reputation, with the world praising him for bringing an end, granting him with the title ‘Sandu Shengshou’.

*But had it brought him the satisfaction he wanted? No. How could it have? When everyone said he had killed his own **brother**. It hadn’t felt like he’d avenged his sister at all.*

His father had brought Wei Wuxian into the sect and had expected Jiang Cheng and A-jieo accept him as family. It had taken a while for Jiang Cheng to warm up to him, but eventually, he was more than happy to have another sibling and so was A-jie. Even so, his mother had never allowed Wei Wuxian to call Jiang Yanli ‘A-jie’ the same way Jiang Cheng did. Because it would mean that he was acknowledging her as his blood sister rather than just a martial sect sister.

“Madam Yu didn’t like it because..well, she wanted me to know my place.” Wei Wuxian’s voice drifts into a sigh as he continues. “I didn’t mind it though, really. It’s not like I had any blood relation to you and Shijie and it wouldn’t have looked proper in front of other sects and-,”

“You’re saying that’s the reason my mother never wanted us to acknowledge you as our brother?” Jiang Cheng interrupts. “If that’s true, then that’s *ridiculous*.” Jiang Cheng forces out the words in one breath. “It wasn’t fair for her to treat you like that. To treat *any* of us like that, but especially you! Just because she was unsatisfied with her marriage.”

“Jiang Cheng-,” Wei Wuxian begins, but Jiang Cheng continues.

“It’s not like my father wanted to change the heir to the sect.” Jiang Cheng can help but snort. “He *couldn’t* have. It’s not just his decision, the sect elders would have to agree too. It’s not that easy to simply change the heir, so I don’t know why my mother was so paranoid. It still wasn’t fair of her to take out her anger on us.”

“She only wanted me to know my place by your side so I could protect you,” Wei Wuxian says quietly. There’s no resentment in his voice, just calm acceptance as if he had never let go of it, even years after the fall of Lotus Pier.

He did protect me. Jiang Cheng thinks. *He gave up his **core** without any hesitation, no matter how risky it was. And even though I distracted those guards that day, Wei Wuxian still lost his core and we both had to pay the consequences that followed in the years after. Whether I like it or not, Wei Wuxian’s sacrifice was with me this entire time, without my knowledge!*

“Who will protect *you* then?” Jiang Cheng snaps, slamming a palm onto the table and standing up to glare down at Wei Wuxian. “Didn’t you think of me as your brother too? And A-jie as your sister?”

“I did.” Wei Wuxian’s voice softens. “Of course I did, but I...” his voice trails off again.

“You already went so far to protect me,” Jiang Cheng continues. “Giving up your core and not telling anyone about it.” The familiar anger builds up in his voice again, the same way it had when Jiang Cheng had screamed at Wei Wuxian at Guangyin Temple. But there’d be no screaming this time. As if Wei Wuxian can sense his anger, he immediately shifts his gaze from Jiang Cheng’s face to the empty cup in front of him.

“Why did you do it?” He asks at last. He realizes he hadn’t probably asked that day at the temple. There’d been far too many emotions running through his head for him to ask or say anything calmly.

Wei Wuxian swallows, “You...you were supposed to be sect leader. You were dying because you wouldn’t eat or drink...I had to find a way to save you. And the fall of Lotus Pier...” His voice shakes. “Your parents’ death...it was my fault. I had no choice...especially after Madam Yu told me to protect you...no I would have done it anyways.” Wei Wuxian’s voice is stubborn and insistent. Once again, Jiang Cheng’s resentment and frustration at his mother flares up.

“Wei Ying, protect Jiang Cheng with your life! Do you understand me?!”

“A-Xian, you must always protect A-Cheng and A-Li.”

His parents’ last words to Wei Wuxian comes back to him with haunting realization. Jiang Cheng has always thought his father hadn’t liked him and chose to show more love to Wei Wuxian instead. But that was far from the truth. His father had told Wei Wuxian to protect him and A-jie just like his mother had. Nobody had told Jiang Cheng and his sister that they should protect their siblings too, that they should protect *one another*. No, the burden had been pushed onto his brother instead. As if...as if he weren’t their sibling.

“I never asked for your core!” Jiang Cheng closes his eyes. He can feel Zidian shaking on his wrist, but he prevents it from loosening off his wrist.

“I *trusted* you to keep A-jie safe and that you’d be enough to protect the sect. That’s why I distracted the guards that day!”

His eyes fly open and he watches as Wei Wuxian's face changes from confusion to pure shock.

"Jiang Cheng? What?" He whispers.

"They were going to kill you," Jiang Cheng says, exhaling slowly. "I distracted them. I ran so they wouldn't catch you."

"But *why*?" It's Wei Wuxian's turn to be angry now and he can almost see Chenqing flaring up with resentful energy in his hands at the change in temperament of its owner. Zidian seems to respond to that by crackling even more. Jiang Cheng presses his hand firmly over it.

"You could have died, Jiang Cheng! You were the sect heir, how could you do something so reckless?"

"*Because*," Jiang Cheng snaps. "You're my *brother*. Do you not understand that? I wasn't going to let you die! Especially not after...after everything that had happened." His voice chokes up now.

How could his brother value his life so little as he constantly sacrifices himself for others?

"I don't understand how you could be so *selfish*! You keep trying to protect others and you get hurt, but you never care about what *we* think. What *I* thought! How do you think I feel everytime you get hurt trying to save others?!"

"I...I'm sorry." Wei Wuxian's voice is small. "It's hard for me to stand by and watch innocent people get hurt even though you've always reminded me to get involved because it'd affect the sect's reputation...."

"It's not about the sect's reputation....," Jiang Cheng whispers, feeling something in him break at his brother's answer. "It's about *you*. Seeing you or A-jie get hurt, I *hate* it. You'd hate it too, wouldn't you? Seeing the people you love get hurt. You...Wei Wuxian..." Jiang Cheng pauses to take a deep breath.

"We care for one another! We're supposed to protect one another! Because that's what a family does! Jiang Cheng's voice is weary now. "You're not our caretaker. They should have told us to look out for one another!"

It was a *war*! How could *both* his parents push the weight onto Wei Wuxian like that?

"Mother didn't let you acknowledge us as siblings, but now you can," Jiang Cheng says softly. "This is our chance to make things right and that includes....things between us. We're the Pride Twins of Yunmeng. You promised to support me when I'm sect leader. Wei Wuxian's eyes seem to light up at this.

"I know." Wei Wuxian finally relaxes. "I will."

"But I have to support you too...as your brother. And I want you to remember to support me as my brother too...and not just my subordinate, understand?"

“Okay.”

A pause.

“Are we telling Shijie?”

Jiang Cheng stiffens, inhales, then lets it back out again.

“We shouldn’t keep this from her. She’s our family,” He says after a while.

“I don’t think she’ll react well to it,” Wei Wuxian says wearily.

No..I didn’t either., but at least she doesn’t need to find out years later.

“I know, but she has the right to know.”

“Alright.”

~

Wei Wuxian meditates for the rest of the afternoon after Jiang Cheng leaves again. He doesn’t unfold his legs from the Lotus Position until he hears a knocking at his door and he hears a familiar voice.

“Shijie?”

“A-Xian, are you awake? A-Cheng and I have come to get you for the banquet. If you’re resting, you don’t have to come. I noticed your candles weren’t lit.”

“I’m coming,” Wei Wuxian calls. He shifts off the bed, stretching out his legs briefly before quickly putting on his robes over the undergarment and going to open the door.

“A-Xian, are you well? How do you feel?” She’s wearing a white mourning sash around her pale green robes and she helps to tie one to his waist.

“I am good,” He reassures her.

“Great, now hurry up!” Jiang Cheng appears from behind his sister, his arms crossed. Looking at him, Wei Wuxian can see he’s far more relaxed than he was earlier this afternoon.

“Coming.” Wei Wuxian rolls his eyes. He throws an arm over Jiang Cheng’s shoulders as they walk towards Nightless City where the banquet was being held in the palace.

“Where are Wen Qing and her family right now?” Wei Wuxian asks. Since almost everyone would be gone from the Qishan residence, they may be left unsupervised.

“I have some disciples looking after them. Don’t worry,” Jiang Cheng replies gruffly.

“Chifeng-zun also has people guarding the residence.”

“Alright. And Jiang Cheng.” Wei Wuxian leans in to whisper into his ear. “Do I need to make a dramatic entrance like last time?”

“You don’t have to,” Jiang Cheng replies. “A-jie handled it fine last time.”

Oh right, she did.

“And if she *wants* to marry him now, it’s her choice.”

“Of course, of course,” Wei Wuxian agrees.

Wei WuXian peels away from Jiang Cheng when he catches a glimpse of familiar white robes, but strong arms pull him back.

“Talk to him later,” Jiang Cheng hisses into his ear. “We should go in as a group.”

“Hmph,” Wei Wuxian grumbles but he straightens his robes and walks next to his two siblings up the stairs. Together they greet Jin Guangshan who has Jin Guangyao by his side. As Wei Wuxian catches his eye, the latter seems to be avoiding it, but he shifts away from his father to greet the Jiangs. They return the greetings. Wei Wuxian and his siblings turn to the left to greet the Lans, who were there early. As he bows, he catches Lan Wangji’s eyes and winks at him

“Sect leader Jiang, congratulations on succeeding as sect leader. When will the ceremony be held?”

“Thank you, Sect leader Jin,” Jiang Cheng replies. “But I am still in mourning. It is not appropriate to hold it yet.”

“Chifeng-zun is here!” A loud voice announces. The Jiangs step to one side to greet Nie Mingjue and Nie Huaisang.

“A-Yao.” The affectionate way Nie Mingjue greets Jin Guangyao takes Wei Wuxian by surprise. He’d been too used to seeing the man treat him with hostility and suspicion.

Surely he hasn’t forgotten about what happened with Xue Yang?

“What’s up with those two?” Wei Wuxian whispers to Jiang Cheng. “Wasn’t Chifeng-zun mistrustful of Jin Guangyao?”

“Those men who went with him into the palace weren’t killed by him,” Jiang Cheng whispers back. I assume that is why.”

“Oh I had something to do with that. But the case with Xue Yang....”

“Ask him about it later. We should go inside first.” Jiang Cheng says, nudging him with his shoulders. Wei Wuxian follows the Jiang disciples further into the room. Last time he’d been here, he’d destroyed the Yin iron and watched Jin Guangyao kill Wen Ruohan. The room no longer held the residual of resentful energy and was strangely peaceful among the crowds of disciples and cultivators.

“Wei Ying.”

Wei Wuxian spins around, his eyes lighting up when he sees who's standing behind him.

"Lan Zhan!" He barely holds himself back from throwing his arms around Lan Wangji's neck like he always did. Around so many cultivators, who at this point, didn't know they were husbands, it would look strange and Jiang Cheng would probably throw him into the lake for bringing shame to the sect.

"Do you want to get out of here? Just for a bit?" Wei Wuxian grabs his hand and tucks him towards the door before he can respond. Everyone else was too busy greeting other cultivators and drinking so they sneak away easily.

"Wei Ying. You and Jin Guangyao..." There's fear in Lan Wangji's voice, an understandable fear.

"Lan Zhan." Wei Wuxian smiles. "You don't have to worry about him. You know I have my charms right?"

"*Wei Ying.*"

"Look...your brother is very close to him and I know you're worried about him too. But however evil...Jin Guangyao might have been in the other timeline, this time, things are going to be different. Do you have a reason to be mistrustful now when there's a chance we could make him a different person?"

"He let Xue Yang go, didn't he?" Lan Wangji frowns. Wei Wuxian sighs

"Right, but we have other ways to catch him. Once he becomes a disciple of the Jin, that is."

"Are you so confident that you can change who he is?"

"I am. Nie Huaisang will also help. He's been friends with Jin Guangyao for longer. He will listen to him."

"Hm." Lan Wangji only nods, still looking skeptical.

"Let's get back inside, why don't we?"

Wei Wuxian can see Jiang Cheng looking at him as he slips back inside and walks over to sit behind him. Jin Guangshan was finishing off his speech and was now addressing Jiang Cheng about reinstating Jin Zixuan's engagement to Jiang Yanli. Wei Wuxian concentrates on the steaming cup of tea in front of him to restrain himself from speaking out as he had done last time. He can see Jiang Cheng shifting his head to look at him as if he had been expecting the same thing.

"Sect leader Jiang, what do you think?"

"Just say 'yes'! This is a good opportunity!" Sect leader Yao calls out.

"I think this decision should be up to my sister," Jiang Cheng says politely, but in a firm and loud voice. Wei Wuxian relaxes.

“Sect leader Jiang, surely this is a decision that should be made by two sect leaders?”

Wei Wuxian rolls his eyes at this, but keeps his eyes on Jiang Cheng so as to not look at Jin Guangshan.

“When my father was alive, he considered my sister’s opinions when it came to this engagement. I’d like to do the same. My sister is capable of making her own decision for her own wedding.” He exchanges a look with his sister as he speaks who nods at him. Jiang Yanli stands and bows at Jin Guangshan.

“Sect leader Jin, I appreciate your kindness, but now is not the time for me to get married. The Jiang sect has gone through havoc and I should focus my time on helping to rebuild.”

“Hmm, very well.” Jin Guangshan nods. Wei Wuxian can see the look of dissatisfaction on the sect leader’s face but he didn’t say anything more. Jiang Yanli sits back down.

“I must ask you one last thing, Sect leader Jiang and I apologize if it isn’t appropriate to ask here.”

“Go ahead,” Jiang Cheng says. Wei Wuxian can see his shoulders stiffening with tension.

“What exactly is your intention for keeping that group of Wen remnants with you? Surely you should let the Jin sect take care of them? Afterall, I’m afraid you may not be able to defend against them if they rebel.”

Wei Wuxian grits his teeth at this and tightens his grip on Chenqing, but a look from his shijie makes him force himself to stay calm.

“Sect leader Jin,” Jiang Cheng says calmly, though there's a tight undertone to his voice. “The Wen remnants are mainly elderly and women. Moreover, they are a branch of healers diverged from the Qishan Wen sect called the Dafan Wens. And I’m sure someone has informed you about Wen Qing’s contribution to the war effort.”

“On whose side?” Sect leader Yao interrupts.

“Ours,” Nie Mingjue replies.

A hushed murmur echoes through the hall.

“I think it is not appropriate to speak about this matter here,” Jiang Cheng says loudly. “Perhaps it is best to be discussed during the next conference meeting. I’ve already decided to take full responsibility for the Dafan Wens. There’s no need to trouble yourself with them, Sect leader Jin.”

“Very well.”

The banquet continues with cultivators from different sects raising glasses to one another while walking around the room. Wei Wuxian hadn’t been here last time so he didn’t know what had gone on, but the banquet ended with Jin Guangyao announcing the hosting of the Phoenix Mountain Hunt in a few months.

~

We're finally home! Jiang Cheng thinks as they approach Lotus Pier. For him, it had been years since he returned back here with someone other than Jin Ling or his disciples. Now as he looks to his left and right, he has his siblings beside him. Behind the Jiang disciples, the Dafan Wens shuffle their feet nervously with Wen Qing and Wen Ning at the front. Glancing back, Jiang Cheng can see them staring at the ground as if they couldn't bear to see the destruction that their relatives have done. Jiang Cheng takes a deep breath to steady himself.

It's not their fault. I'm not going to blame them. Not this time.

"A-Cheng?" His sister looks over at him with a worried look on her face.

"Jiang Cheng, let's go," Wei Wuxian says softly, reaching over to squeeze his hand briefly before pulling away again almost as quickly. Looking over, he can see there's hesitation in Wei Wuxian's eyes, just like there had been when he had come to Lotus Pier with Lan Wangji. Jiang Cheng swallows. It hadn't been a pleasant visit. He remembers Lan Wangji leaving with Wei Wuxian pale and bleeding in his arms and the numbness he had felt as Wen Ning shouted everything out about the golden core to him.

He shakes away the thoughts, takes a deep breath and pushes open the door. He tries not to flinch at being greeted by the sight of dried blood on the usually clean stone courtyard. He is back to where he started, Jiang Cheng realizes with a heavy heart. He had to rebuild the sect from the ground again. But he had done it before and he could do it again.

They approach Sword Hall and look up to see the Qisan Wen sect, sitting on its rooftop. Jiang Cheng sees Wei Wuxian clenching onto his flute, but like last time, he makes short work of the crest by destroying it with Zidian. He doesn't miss the loud sharp intake of breath from Wen Qing.

They spend the remaining day cleaning up the courtyard and running to town to buy cots for everyone to sleep in temporarily. After a cleaning of the rooms that are mostly intact, they settle down the Wens in the south side of Lotus Pier. He and Wei Wuxian had both agreed on keeping the Wens out of sight from the main courtyard in case they had some unexpected visitors. Wei Wuxian, Jiang Cheng realizes, doesn't slip away as he had done last time. Instead he instructs the disciples to run errands to town and where to put the new furniture.

*At least he's doing **something** this time,* Jiang Cheng thinks. But he knows that when it came to training the disciples through their drills, he'd have to find someone else. That night, Jiang Cheng had Wei Wuxian set his cot up in his room. They lie down side by side on the floor. It reminded Jiang Cheng of the days when they were kids.

"Jiang Cheng, are you awake?" A faint murmur comes from his side.

"Yes." Jiang Cheng hears shuffling as Wei Wuxian turns his face towards him.

“I...I know I said I’d help you rebuild the sect...for real this time, but I...I don’t know if there’s much I can do.”

Jiang Cheng sighs. He keeps his back towards Wei Wuxian as he speaks.

“You being with me is enough.”

“Jiang Cheng...”

Jiang Cheng turns around so that he’s facing Wei Wuxian now, staring into uncertain silver eyes.

“Staying by my side is enough for me. It’s still keeping your promise.”

“Alright, Jiang Cheng. I’ll stay.” Even in the darkness, Jiang Cheng can see Wei Wuxian’s crinkling into a smile.

“But Jiang Cheng, if I marry Lan Zhan, I’ll be living in Cloud Recesses.”

“ *Ha* , we’ll have to see about that,” Jiang Cheng mutters

“Huh?”

“Shut up and go to sleep.” Jiang Cheng shifts back around on the bed

“Wait b-,”

“ *Sleep* ,” Jiang Cheng growls. “Or I’ll kick you out of the room.”

“So mean, Jiang Cheng. We’re not kids anymore,” Wei Wuxian whines.

“Just shut up and sleep!” Jiang Cheng kicks back his leg, lightly.

“Okay fine fine. Good night then.”

Jiang Cheng hears him shift back around.

“Good night.”

Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Wei Wuxian, what are you up to now?”

His brother is sitting on the floor inside Sword Hall, studying the papers scattered out in front of him.

“Learning spell arrays,” Wei Wuxian replies without looking up.

“For defense?” Jiang Cheng kneels down next to him, squinting at the papers as he tries to understand the context. He can’t help his own curiosity this time about his brother’s new path of cultivation.

“Of course. It’s not like I can defend Lotus Pier with a sword anyways...” His voice falters away.

“Never mind that,” Jiang Cheng interrupts. “Just do what you do best. It’s not like it’s dangerous.”

“That depends on what I’m making,” Wei Wuxian says pointedly.

“Of course,” Jiang Cheng mutters. “You still remember how to make your inventions?”

“Obviously. I’m the one who made them. How would I forget? I was thinking of selling them.”

Jiang Cheng blinks at him.

“For money?”

“Yea.” Wei Wuxian nods. “I remember seeing someone sell a cheaply made Compass of Evil when I went to town from the Burial Mounds to sell radishes. So I exchanged them for that and improved on the tool myself.”

“They accepted that exchange?” Jiang Cheng snorts.

“Not exactly.” Wei Wuxian gives him a sheepish grin that makes Jiang Cheng smack his shoulder.

“Whatever, go back to your doodling. I’ve got sect leader business to take care of.” Jiang Cheng steps away from the hall. “Also, if you’re testing things out, don’t do it in the hall in case something explodes,” He calls back before closing the door.

He walks the newly recruited disciples through their drill. It had been almost half a month since returning to Lotus Pier and things were slowly getting back to normal. The men that

had been under Wen Qing and Wen Ning's command had proven their loyalty through their contribution to the restoration of Lotus Pier. Jiang Cheng hadn't met them last time, only Wen Qing's immediate family, but he was doing things differently this time and tried his best to push away the resentment burning inside him at the sight of Wens.

He trains them until noon when his sister comes to call him for lunch. Wei Wuxian is already there, helping to scoop soup into three different bowls. There is a strange lack of meat in the bowl Wei Wuxian chose for himself, but Jiang Cheng doesn't dwell on it as he sits.

"I've brought some for the Wens already," His sister tells him. "Little A-Yuan seems to enjoy the soup a lot!"

"Shije's soup should be liked by everyone!" Wei Wuxian says earnestly as he puts a bowl of soup in front of Jiang Cheng.

"Obviously," Jiang Cheng replies. They eat in silence and as soon as Wei Wuxian finishes his last bowl, he places it on the table and gives Jiang Cheng a serious look.

"If we're going to tell her, we need to do it now," He says quietly, glancing back at where their sister is at the stove.

"Now?" Jiang Cheng stares at him incredulously.

"I didn't want to say anything while eating," Wei Wuxian shrugs.

"I'm not sure-," Jiang Cheng begins, but stops when their sister comes back over.

"You have something to tell me? I heard you two talking." She looks back and forth between the two of them with a questioning look on her face. Just like that, the courage seems to drain from both of them.

"Shijie..." Wei Wuxian's voice is quiet then he sighs.

"Is something wrong?" Now she sounds worried. "Did you two argue again?"

"No," Jiang Cheng protests quickly. "It's not that. We just have something important to tell you. Can we talk somewhere private?"

"Let's go to the back garden," Wei Wuxian says. They put out the fire for the stove, clean up the dishes and head there to talk.

They both take a deep breath.

"I don't have a core anymore," Wei Wuxian says, his eyes flickering to the table. He hears his sister's breath hitch and her eyes widen in disbelief. She makes a grab for his wrist. For once Wei Wuxian doesn't pull away, allowing her to feel his meridians that ultimately lead up to an empty hole where his core should be. The core that was now thrumming inside Jiang Cheng's chest.

"*How?*" Her voice is barely audible, like a whisper in the wind. "You fought in the war without a core?? *A-Xian!*"

“I-,” Wei Wuxian’s voice trails away.

“Didn’t you get your core restored by Baoshan Sanren, A-Cheng? We can go back, can’t we?” A-jie says desperately.

“Nobody restored it. Wen Qing performed a surgery.” Jiang Cheng finds himself unable to meet his sister’s eyes.

“A-Cheng,” A-jie begins, her eyes furrowing downwards.

“He didn’t ask me. He only found out recently too,” Wei Wuxian says quickly. “It was my own decision. Nobody was supposed to know...just me, Wen Ning and Wen Qing. I gave it to him.”

“A-Xian, how can you do something like that without our knowledge?” Shijie cries out.

“There wasn’t any other way to save Jiang Cheng. I had no choice!” Wei Wuxian’s voice grows shaky. “I don’t regret anything. He needed it more than me!”

Jiang Cheng winces, automatically clenching his fist in frustration and bitterness at the reminder of how quickly Wei Wuxian had been willing to sacrifice his core for him, to sacrifice *himself* for others. He doesn’t even *want* to think about how the procedure would have gone.

“A-Xian, A-Cheng, it’ll be alright. We’ll get through this together.” A-jie wraps her arms around them both, pulling them close.

“We will,” Jiang Cheng agrees, looking at his siblings. “We promised each other we’ll stay together and that is what we will do.”

Their sister pulls them closer into a hug until he can feel each other’s breath next to his ears.

“Is there really no way for you to have a core again? We should ask Wen Qing....,” A-jie says once they’ve pulled apart.

“My meridians weren’t crushed. They’re still intact.” Wei Wuxian swallowed. “I don’t think it is impossible.”

“We’ll ask Wen Qing. She knows best. After all she...” Jiang Cheng shakes his head. “I’ll go talk to her. I need to check up on them anyway.” He rises to stand up.

“A-Xian, wait...you disappeared for three months before the war. Where were you? Was it because you lost your core?” Jiang Cheng freezes his movement at the question. Turning back, he can see that Wei Wuxian’s face has paled significantly.

When neither of them speak up, A-jie pulls Jiang Cheng back towards them, not letting him leave.

“A-Cheng says that all the guards he interrogated claimed you were thrown into the Burial Mounds. I didn’t want to believe it then...nobody ever survives down there. But you were

there, weren't you? You changed so much after three months..."

"Shijie, I can't...I can't talk about it." Wei Wuxian is gripping his fist so tightly that Jiang Cheng can see his knuckles turn white. He feels his own chill down his spine.

Now that he knew the whole truth, he couldn't help but think of what his brother had gone through in the Burial Mounds. They had all suffered so much during the war, but down there in a dark place like that, there's no telling what someone would have gone through. The chills he had earlier turn even colder when he thinks of the lack of meat in Wei Wuxian's soup bowl earlier.

"A-jie...he's back and that's all that matters. We...we shouldn't push him for answers." Jiang Cheng puts a tender hand over his sister's.

"Okay," She says at last, wiping her face with the back of her hand. "But from now on, can we not keep any secrets? Especially not from each other. We have to be there for one another more than ever."

"Sure," Jiang Cheng says, swallowing. He had never been good at communicating his feelings, but

"Don't worry, Shijie. I won't keep anything else from you both," Wei Wuxian adds. Jiang Cheng shoots him a suspicious look. He wasn't sure how much he could trust *that* promise.

"I should go to Wen Qing now," Jiang Cheng says, turning to leave.

"Jiang Cheng, promise me you won't get mad at them," Wei Wuxian says.

"I," Jiang Cheng takes a deep breath. "I'll try not to."

He leaves the room and heads towards the south wing.

"Jiang shushu!" He stops in his tracks as something collides with his ankle, forcing him to brace himself against the impact.

"A-Yuan, come back here!" A voice shouts, followed by footsteps as Wen Ning steps into the hall.

"Sect leader Jiang," Wen Ning greets nervously.

"Wen Qionglin," Jiang Cheng greets back, his voice terse. For a moment, he had almost forgotten how Wen Ning had looked before becoming the Ghost General. It was totally strange for Jiang Cheng to see him at Lotus Pier like this, alive, his eyes bright and his smile warm and not with skin as pale as death.

"Are you here to see my sister?" Wen Ning asks once he has Wen Yuan in his arms again. For some reason, Jiang Cheng feels heat creeping up his face at this question, but he nods.

"I have something important to discuss with her."

After dropping Wen Yuan off to be taken care of by his grandmother, Wen Ning leads him to his sister's office where she has set up a small clinic. She looks up as they enter. Wen Ning busies himself with organizing the herbs in the drawers.

"I need to talk to you about my brother." Jiang Cheng gets straight to the point. She blinks in surprise.

"I assume you're going to inquire about his health? Given that I was his primary healer during the war," She asks. Jiang Cheng nods.

"I know about his core," He says. Her eyes fly upwards in shock. A loud clatter comes from Wen Ning's side of the room.

"How?" She asks in a surprisingly calm voice despite her reaction.

"It wasn't that easy for him to hide it," Jiang Cheng says, thinking on his feet. "I couldn't pass him spiritual energy nor could I feel his core. I don't need to be a skilled doctor to tell when someone's core is gone."

"I see. So Wen Chao really did capture him. Before the war I mean." Her voice grows solemn and quiet. "And he survived the Burial Mound."

"I know the whole truth, Wen Qing," Jiang Cheng says curtly. "But I'm not here to talk about that. I want to know if my brother can recultivate a new core."

"The *whole* truth?" Wen Qing's lips tremble. "You...how is it even possible? He swore he would never tell anyone. He made *us* swear it."

"He basically planned to keep the truth from me to his grave, didn't he?" Jiang Cheng snorts, hearing bitterness creep up his voice again but he quickly pushes it away.

"He's an idiot like that..." Jiang Cheng says softly. "He's always been like that. But do you really think I wouldn't be able to put two and two together?"

Wen Qing looks away, unable to meet his eyes while Wen Ning stares at the floor.

"I got my core restored and then my brother disappeared for three months after that and when he did return, he stopped using his sword. He refuses to even carry it and the cultivation methods he started using...that was just his means of survival wasn't it?" Jiang Cheng takes a deep breath before continuing again,

"I didn't want to believe the guards when they told me about how Wei Wuxian got thrown into the Burial Mounds, no matter how many of them I questioned." *Because I didn't want to believe he was dead...because nobody survives in that place.*

"But my sister and I both knew that something was wrong with him when he came back. He refused to talk about it, but we both suspected what had happened. He used his new cultivation to be able to survive and come back to us."

Wen Ning and Wen Qing are quiet for the longest time and then Wen Qing speaks again.

“I always knew he was strong. But to survive a place like that....it’s nearly impossible.”

Yeah well...Wei Wuxian has always been good at attempting the impossible...

“It isn’t impossible for him to cultivate another core,” Wen Qing says at last. “His meridians weren’t crushed. His core was surgically removed and detached from them. So yes, he can make another core again, but,” Wen Qing bites her lips nervously. “At his age, it isn’t easier. A golden core is normally cultivated from a young age.”

“If anyone is capable of being up to challenges, it’s Wei Wuxian,” Jiang Cheng says at last, letting out a small chuckle. “Help him in any way you can and I’ll do whatever it takes to make sure you and your people stay in my sanctuary.”

“I’ll do my best, Sect leader Jiang,” Wen Qing says with a bow.

“I-I will help too,” Wen Ning says, bowing as well. “Young Master Wei is my friend. I’ll do whatever it takes.”

“Right.” Jiang Cheng nods. “I’ll have you both moved to the main wing. I’ve already ordered people to have the clinic moved there.”

“Sect leader Jiang?” Wen Qing looks stunned.

“You’re probably the best doctor in all of the four sects. It’d be ridiculous if someone didn’t value your skills,” Jiang Cheng continues. “Sooner or later, the other sects will have to realize that. If the rest of your family wishes to move their rooms closer, let me know.”

“Thank you.” Wen Qing dips her head again. Jiang Cheng returns it and walks back to the main hall, feeling a weight lift off his chest, the way it always did whenever he speaks to Wen Qing.

He spends most of the week answering political letters and overseeing the construction. His sister also helps with rebuilding as well while Wei Wuxian and Wen Ning help to run errands in the town. They buy herbs to help Wen Qing restore her herb supply, most of it had been lost in raids done by other sects in Qishan despite Jiang Cheng sending disciples to the Yiling Supervisory Office to recover some of them. Meanwhile, Jiang Cheng assigns one of the senior disciples to take over the training drills.

“Sect leader, Young Master Nie has asked to see you and Wei Wuxian.” Jiang Cheng puts down his brush and frowns thoughtfully.

Why is he suddenly here?

Jiang Cheng steps out of the room and walks to Sword Hall. Wei Wuxian is already there, standing near the lotus chair, waiting for Jiang Cheng while keeping a fair distance between him and Nie Huaisang.

“Good, you’re here Jiang Cheng. Now we have to ask some important questions to Nie-xiong here.” Wei Wuxian’s eyes are wary as he looks over at Nie Huaisang.

“We should talk in my study. It’s more private,” Jiang Cheng declares, gesturing with one hand. The two follow him there. Jiang Cheng closes the door behind him, sticking silencing talismans to the door just for extra caution.

“Ask me whatever you need to ask, Wei-xiong,” Nie Huaisang asks calmly, snapping his fan closed and laying it on the table in front of him.

“First, how did you get information on forbidden time travel arrays?”

“Shouldn’t you have guessed that by now?” Nie Huaisang counters. Jiang Cheng raises his eyebrows at Wei Wuxian.

“Ah well...I had notes on it,” Wei Wuxian confesses. “But I never made any diagrams or arrays for it. I assumed that the notes were destroyed when the sects raided the Burial Mounds.”

“Most of those notes were taken by Jin Guangyao,” Jiang Cheng points out.

“Ah right. So you somehow took the notes from him then? And improvised on them?” Wei Wuxian crosses his arms. “You’re full of surprises, aren’t you?”

Jiang Cheng rolls his eyes at this.

“I have more important news to update on. On Meng Yao,” Nie Huaisang says, clearing his throat.

“Yes?”

“He’s been keeping a keen ear on his father and Jin Zixun. Sect leader Jin is making a move to try and claim the amulet in this timeline as well.”

“Of course he would,” Jiang Cheng snorts.

“We know you were able to rescue Wen Qing’s family specifically but there were under Wen civilians that got captured by the Jins. The labor camps are still a thing.” Nie Huaisang grimaces while Wei Wuxian tenses visibly, his hands tightening on ChenQing on instinct.

“You’re not doing what you did last time. You don’t *have* to,” Jiang Cheng says warningly.

“But the civilians-,” Wei Wuxian begins.

“We won’t abandon them. We’ll simply wait until Jin Guangshan exposes his own crimes.” Jiang Cheng can see Wei Wuxian wanting to protest more. Because both of them know that innocent lives could be lost while they waited for the right time

“If only we had witnesses...then there’d be proof of the labor camps,” Wei Wuxian murmurs.

“Nobody would believe them,” Jiang Cheng says. “Unless one of us were too and we saw it too.”

“Who was involved with setting up the camps this time?” Wei Wuxian asks through narrowed eyes.”

“Meng Yao wasn’t involved,” Nie Huaisang says calmly as he snaps open his fan. “He didn’t want to get involved. I do not know exactly who it is but I do not doubt that Jin Zixun is involved.”

“You really have Jin Guangyao wrapped around your fingers, this time huh? I’m surprised you don’t want him dead,” Wei Wuxian huffs.

“I won’t have a reason to do that unless he tries to do something that will harm my Da-ge in this timeline,” Nie Huaisang answers. “He was my friend,” He adds in a tight voice. He takes a deep breath. “I want to help change him like you are doing, Wei-xiong. I reminded my brother that he was one of my few friends and that was the only way I convinced Da-ge to give him another chance plus...he killed Wen Ruohan and saved you from the dungeon, Wei-xiong.”

“What did you tell him?” Jiang Cheng frowns. “How did you get Chifeng-zun to trust him again after he let Xue Yang go?”

“Ah that,” Nie Huaisang hides his face behind his fan. “I got the two to talk.”

“You what?” Wei Wuxian raises his eyebrows. “You got them to talk without your brother trying to slice him apart? *How* ?”

“Enlighten us,” Jiang Cheng adds.

“I’m his little brother,” Nie Huaisang replies as if it was the most simple thing.

“So?” Jiang Cheng snorts. “I’m Wei Wuxian’s didi and it’s not like he always gives me what I want.”

“Jiang Cheng!”

“Xue Yang used a spell,” Nie Huaisang cuts in before the two of them could end up bickering.

“Wasn’t his spiritual energy sealed?” Jiang Cheng’s brows furrowed. “He was locked in the dungeon, wasn’t he?”

“Xue Yang knows Demonic Cultivation,” Wei Wuxian reminds him. “He must have used some talisman or maybe even an array drawn on the ground by blood.”

“Right, when did this happen by the way? Before the banquet?” Jiang Cheng questions.

“Yes.” Nie Huaisang nods. “It was right after Meng Yao came back. My brother wanted to ask him a lot of questions, especially regarding his working for Wen Ruohan as a spy.”

“So he didn’t set Xue Yang free on purpose then?” Wei Wuxian blows out a low breath.

“Well, that seems to solve a huge issue.”

“Which is?” Jiang Cheng looks at him.

“The trust issue between Jin Guangyao and Chifeng-zun,” Wei Wuxian explains. “Their relationship was unstable last time. Now that there’s trust between all three sworn brothers, Chifeng-zun won’t be hostile towards him.”

“Ah, you’re right Wei-xiong. In fact, the three of them are *very* close,” Nie Huaisang seems to smirk.

“Okay anyways, what were you going to tell us about Jin Guangshan?”

“We all know how Jin Guangshan treated Jin Guangyao and Wei-xiong told me in the last letter he sent about his conversation with Jin Guangyao. He’s not a very big fan of him of course. I somehow convinced Zixuan-xiong to be his friend,” Nie Huaisang continues.

“So is he on board with our murder plan?” Wei Wuxian grins. Jiang Cheng punches his arm in warning.

“Wei Wuxian!” Jiang Cheng hisses.

“It’s what we’re doing, isn’t it? Well, personally for me, I would want to end it as quickly as possible, but it’s not like we can kill him that easily.” Wei Wuxia snorts. “Can we get rid of Jin Zixun too?”

“*Wei Wuxian*,” Jiang Cheng says again, exasperated. “We can’t just go around killing everyone we don’t like.” he pauses. “But I agree, Jin Zixun needs to die.”

Both Nie Huaisang and Wei Wuxian exchange a smirk.

“I could let san-ge take care of him to be honest,” Nie Huaisang shrugs. “But I’m afraid he may be the first one accused. I agree with Jiang-xiong. We can’t stoop to their level. We reveal their crimes and let the rest of the cultivation world be their judge. For now, he will send me letters on Jin Guangshan’s actions.”

“Aren’t we going to tell Chifeng-zun and Zewu-jun?” Wei Wuxian asks.

“About what? The labor camps? We don’t have proof yet,” Jiang Cheng replies. “And Jin Guangyao’s words alone aren’t enough to prove it to them. Chifeng-zun would want to see evidence with his own eyes.”

“Right,” Wei Wuxian agrees.

“Last case,” Nie Huaisang says as he sips his tea. “I sent an anonymous letter to Qin Su, telling her that Jin Guangshan is her father. I do not know whether she will believe it is up to her. Bicao may reveal it to her mistress about what Jin Guangshan did in order for Qin Su to be conceived.”

“This will prevent them from marrying.” Jiang Cheng nods. In the beginning, there seemed to be an overwhelming amount of cases to be dealt with. But now they admittedly had Nie Huaisang as their ally.

“So I’ve told you everything that I needed to tell you. I’ll keep sending you updates about Meng Yao through letters,” Nie Huaisang stands, ready to leave.

“Alright, make sure you stay discreet,” Jiang Cheng tells him. They escort him to the front entrance and wave their goodbyes.

Chapter End Notes

A few notes:

1. Wei Wuxian not eating meat has to do with his experience in the Burial Mounds. I won't go into details but I'll let you guys speculate
2. We have NHS and JGY teaming up, such power!!
3. I honestly want a way to kill JGS off as soon as possible but I can only think of ideas that will build up to that scene, so we will have to tolerate him for a bit longer D:
4. There are so many ppl to save and Mo Xuanyu will be one of them! Because he deserves love!

Please be sure to leave a comment to let me know what you think of this chapter! The next chapter will involve some (intense) conversation between LWJ and JC so be ready!

Also do you think it is a good idea for me to have the other characters regain memories or just have LWJ, NHS, JC, and WWX retain memories from the future?

Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

I meant to update 'Rewrite the stars' today but I had already written most of this chapter so I decided to post this one instead. I may go back and make changes to grammar and possibly make other edits too

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Young Master Wei, this is A-Yuan, my cousin.” Wen Ning guides the little boy over to him.

“A-Yuan, I’m your Xian-gege.” Wei Wuxian kneels down and touches his face softly. He had been meaning to come earlier, but had been held back by helping Jiang Cheng with sect leader duties.

How could I have forgotten how cute and tiny you were back then? I’ve been too used to seeing you as a bright disciple and cultivator. I didn’t get a chance to see you grow up...this time I will.

“Come, I’ll show you around Lotus Pier. Wen Ning, Wen Qing, you should come too. You’ve been cooped up inside for far too long.” Wei Wuxian says as he scoops A-Yuan into his arms out of habit. Wen Qing narrows her eyes at this but A-Yuan only giggles and hugs Wei Wuxian’s neck.

“Your brother said it was for our own safety that we stay discreet for the first week,” Wen Qing says, pursing her lips.

“Wen Ning went to town with me,” Wei Wuxian points out. “Nobody in Yunmeng will be hostile to you. Come on, Qing-jie.” Wei Wuxian’s lips freeze on the words then he looks away embarrassed.

““Qing-jie’?” Wei Wuxian can feel Wen Qing’s eyes boring into him. He clears his throat. “Uh, I’m going to ask if Shijie wants to come along. A-Yuan, do you want to meet her?”

“Yes!” The boy answers eagerly. Wen Qing lets out an exasperated sigh.

“A-Ning, you can stay here and look after the others. I’ll go with Wei Wuxian.”

“Alright, jie.” Wen Ning nods obediently.

“Shijie! I’m going to take A-Yuan to walk around Yunmeng. Do you want to come?” Wei Wuxian calls out to where his sister is sitting at a table and picking lotus seeds.

“I’d love to show Lady Wen around,” She replies with a smile as she stands and walks over to them. “Oh and hello A-Yuan.” She pinches his cheeks lightly.

“Have you been behaving yourself?”

“Mn.” A-Yuan nods happily.

“My A-Yuan is the best!” Wei Wuxian declares.

“Who’s your A-Yuan?” Wen Qing huffs, eyes glaring like flint. “He’s my cousin. And you’ve only just met him!”

Wei Wuxian looks embarrassed again. He had been too used to seeing A-Yuan as his son all these years and Wen Qing as a sister.

“He’s my Xian-gege,” A-Yuan says cheerfully.

“Yes I am,” Wei Wuxian replies. Wen Qing sighs while Shijie looks on with a fond smile.

“A-Xian is good with kids. A-Yuan will enjoy his company.”

Good with them?...ahaha . Wei Wuxian distinctly recalls a time where he got yelled at by Wen Qing for burying A-Yuan in the dirt while pretending he was a radish and getting his clothes dirty.

“We should go now before it gets dark. Let’s go buy some toys for A-Yuan.”

They walk to town with disciples on Jiang Cheng’s orders.

“They’re supposed to stay inside Lotus Pier,” Jiang Cheng had said with an irritated look at Wei Wuxian before they left. “But as long as they don’t wear their own robes, it should be fine. They won’t be recognized.”

“Qing-jie!” A-Yuan says excitedly as he pulls Wei Wuxian along. “I want this!” He points at the straw butterfly toy.

“A-Yuan,” Wen Qing scolds gently. “We don’t have the money. We need to save it for supplies and herbs for Granny and the others, okay?”

“Lady Wen, let me,” Shijie takes out her money pouch.

“A-Yuan, choose a few that you like.”

“Young children need to play as they grow. And A-Yuan has already been through so much. We both have much to rebuild from the war.”

“Lady Jiang,” Wen Qing tries to protest. “You’ve already done so much for us...”

“It’s nothing, really. For the little one.”

A-Yuan finishes picking out the toys and Shijie pays.

“A-Yuan, what do you say?”

“Thank you, Auntie,” A-Yuan says while hugging her.

“Where do you want to go next, Lady Wen?” Wei Wuxian asks, remembering to be formal this time. “Do you need to buy anything from the herbal shops?”

“You and A-Ning brought enough for us last time,” Wen Qing answers. “I do not believe I need to buy anything else.”

“How about this comb then?” Shijie suggests, picking one up from the stand. Wen Qing’s eye on it for a long time.

“Your brother gave me one,” She says, her voice suddenly growing quiet.

“Jiang Cheng?” Wei Wuxian blinks in surprise.

“Yes,” Wen Qing gives him a look. “What other brother do you and Lady Jiang have?”

“I wonder why though. A-Cheng seldom gives items to others,” Shijie says.

“Ah,” The lady at the stand smiles. “I do not know if you know this, but a comb symbolizes love sickness. Your brother must have given it to this lady here for that reason.”

“L-love sickness?” Wei Wuxian sputters. “*Jiang Cheng* has...” He falls silent and tries to hold back his laughter. He should have known by the way Jiang Cheng couldn’t keep his eyes off Wen Qing during the lectures at Cloud Recesses, though he had expected him to have lost those feelings after the burning of Lotus Pier. His hatred for them had been too strong last time, but of course things would be different this time.

“A-Xian,” Shijie scolds, but there’s no heat to her voice and her eyes are crinkled in a smile.

“He gave that comb to me when he promised to protect our family,” Wen Qing admits.

“He...well, I refused at first because I knew he didn’t want to choose between protecting his sect and mine, especially when our reputation is so...bad.”

“If my brother gave it to you, it means he trusts you,” Shijie says. “He did keep his promise, didn’t he?”

“Yes well.” Wen Qing’s face reddens. “He did.”

Shijie and Wei Wuxian both smile.

“Well, if we’re done here, we can go back.”

“Wait, one last thing.” Wei Wuxian gestures to the alcohol shop. “I’ll bring a jar back for Jiang Cheng.”

He walks into the shop and comes back out after a while with two jars of alcohol. Then the four of them return to Lotus Pier.

“A-Yuan, I’ll teach you how to swim next summer! And shoot kites,” Wei Wuxian tells the boy. “And pick lotus seeds from their pods too.”

Wen Qing gives him a look, but it’s not as fierce as it always is. She simply sighs and shakes her head.

“Keep an eye on him then. It’ll let Granny Wen take a break. And Lady Jiang, my people have been asking if there are tasks they can do. They don’t want to be sitting around so much after your sect has given us so much hospitality.”

“Lady Wen, you are our guests,” Shijie says gently, taking Wen Qing’s hand. “You saved me and my brothers, it’s something we won’t forget.”

“You saved mine as well,” Wen Qing says. “And my family. We need to do *something* especially if we are staying here. I insist.”

“Shijie, we need the extra hands. I’m sure Wen Qing’s people are more than capable.”

“Of course they are,” Wen Qing retorts, crossing her arms. “We’re used to helping out like this. Everyone in my family had to contribute because we all needed to work hard to survive. We can help with farming or rebuilding the damaged houses.”

“I see.” Shijie smiles. “I would love help in the kitchen sometimes. I always wanted a companion with cooking. Would you like to join me?”

“Sure.” Wen Qing nods. “I’ll first let everyone know that they can help out around Lotus Pier and Yunmeng.”

“If other sect members question it, I’ll tell them you’re helping us rebuild,” Wei Wuxian says. “I’ll be off now. A-Yuan, let’s go play for a while alright? Before Jiang Cheng comes to scold me.”

“Okay!”

~

“Sect leader, there seems to be a huge demand for a certain item in the marketplace,” A disciple reports to him.

“What item?” Jiang Cheng asks. “One of Wei Wuxian’s inventions?”

“Yes. The Compass of Evil I believe? Such a strange name he picked. But the item is very useful. The needle on it points out which direction evil spirits are in. I didn’t know da-shixiong was this handy.”

“Ha...he’s full of surprises,” Jiang Cheng mutters.

Just then, another disciple hurries towards him, announcing that Hanguang-jun had arrived.

“Wei Wuxian will be delighted to see him. Send him to greet him,” Jiang Cheng tells the disciple.

“He’s...specifically asked to talk to you first.”

Jiang Cheng frowns at this.

Since when did Lan Wangji want to talk to me? Unless it was for something political. But Lan Wangji knows what I did...so why isn’t trying to avoid me? Like he did all those years after Wei Wuxian’s death..

He nods, waving the disciple off. He goes to meet the man in Sword Hall. The floor was clean now, no longer littered in his brother’s papers.

“Hanguang-jun,” Jiang Cheng greets.

“Sect leader Jiang,” Lan Wangji returns, his voice colder than normal.

“Are you here to talk to me about my brother?” Jiang Cheng asks, despite having been prepared for this confrontation since Wei WuXian had performed Empathy with him.

“You and Wei Ying. What are you to one another?”

The question takes Jiang Cheng aback as he blinks in confusion.

Is he being jealous? Or was he asking a legitimate question?

He had envied the way Wei WuXian had tried to become close to Lan Wangji in their early days at Cloud Recesses, but he hadn’t considered that Lan Wangji might be jealous of the relationship he had with his brother.

“He’s my brother. My family.” He tries to sound confident, but after years of resentment and hatred towards Wei WuXian, the word sticks in his throat as he speaks.

“Yet you hurt him. You threw him away.”

A sudden surge of anger overcomes Jiang Cheng when he hears these words. Zidian starts giving off tiny sparks and he sees Lan Wangji’s hand tightening over Bichen. Jiang Cheng takes a deep breath. He was not going to get into a fight with Lan Wangji, not now. It was certainly not because of his promise to Wei WuXian or the fact that his brother was soon to be married to the man in front of him. It was because they needed allies. Lan Wangji had protected Wei WuXian in the past and he would do it again.

“He left me first. He *told* me to leave him!” The words escape his mouth laced with fury and years of built-up frustration. As Lan Wangji only stares wordlessly back at him, he continues.

“Do you think it was an easy decision to make? I had to choose between the wellbeing of my barely-stable sect and my *own brother* when I never should have had to separate my priorities for them!” He barely takes a moment to catch his breath as the words fly out from his mouth.

“Don’t pretend to know how hard it is to be sect leader and have to make difficult decisions due to the position!”

I wanted to protect him, I just wanted so badly for him to come home, to get rid of the target he had painted on his back, but my sect just wasn’t strong enough. I really had to choose between my own brother and the rest of my sect, a choice I never should have had to make in my entire life! Why was it that I failed to protect him after I lost so much and he and A-jie were the only close family I had left?

“I do not know about being a sect leader, but I had to make difficult decisions,” Lan Wangji replies back coolly. Jiang Cheng sets his teeth and clamps a hand over Zidian on his other wrist to prevent it from lashing out.

Of course he had to make difficult decisions too, but how much did he have to sacrifice for it? Other than having to be forced into seclusion. Lan Wangji had chosen to stand by Wei WuXian against the rest of the world, but why? Why would Lan Wangji turn his back against his own sect for someone who wasn’t even his family? Why was it that I couldn’t do the same and had instead been forced to swear an alliance with the other sects to kill my own brother? Even if at the time, everyone thought he had killed Jin Zixuan, all I really wanted was to bring his brother home.

*Wei Wuxian had to make difficult decisions too. He thinks bitterly. When he chose to protect Wen Qing and her family over his own sect...Wei WuXian made himself vulnerable to Jin Guangyao and Jin Guangshan..no we were **all** tricked by them. We got manipulated by the Jins. And Jin Zixuan and A-jie had to pay the price. And I had to suffer from the consequences*

“At the cliff,” Lan Wangji says slowly. “Wei Ying let go. You made him let go.”

“I-,” Jiang Cheng finds himself lost for words, a lump stuck in his throat.

He hadn’t meant to... (had he?) He had been so angry at Wei Wuxian for his sister’s death. For Jin Zixuan’s death. Had that rage really driven him to kill his own brother? He had been angry before, screamed hurtful words at his brother and hurt him, but that day at the cliff...would he really have gone so far? Even if he had done it subconsciously...

Jiang Cheng barely keeps himself from shutting his eyes. As if he needed to be reminded of this. As if he hadn’t had weeks of restless nights after his siblings’ death, unable to push the image of his brother falling out of sight into the abyss out of his mind after that night of bloodshed and violence.

Lan Wangji was blaming him for Wei WuXian’s death. He *had* blamed him. And deep down, he had told himself hated Wei WuXian and blamed him for his sister’s death when in truth, he blamed *himself* for not being able to protect either of them. He hadn’t protected the only true family he had left.

All of those years of resentment towards Lan Wangji, it wasn’t really because his brother had been deemed the enemy of the cultivation world and the righteous Hanguang-jun had protected him regardless. It was because Lan Wangji, an outsider, someone from another sect,

had protected his brother better than him. Even after Wei Wuxian got resurrected, he hadn't come to Lotus Pier, which had only further fueled his bitterness. But now...

"Neither of us protected him. Do not pretend you didn't fail too!" Jiang Cheng snaps hotly. "We *both* had to watch him die and we were helpless to prevent it!"

These words manage to waver Lan Wangji's wall of indifference on his face. There's a flash of something in his eyes. Guilt? Sorrow?

"Are you going to let yourself fail again?" Jiang Cheng's voice steadies along with his breathing.

"No," Lan Wangji says firmly.

"And neither will I," Jiang Cheng replies calmly. "We've lost people before and now that we have a chance to save them again, we won't stand idly by ever again."

*I won't let myself be manipulated ever again. Even if it is impossible, I will stand by his side this time. Because that is what Jiangs do. And it's what I **should** have done.*

Lan Wangji stares at Jiang Cheng silently for a long time. Then he simply nods.

"Let's hope that it will be different this time then."

"He walks away."

~

"Wei Wuxian! What on earth are you doing?" Wei Wuxian jumps at the sound of Wen Qing's voice and he turns away from the garden, smiling guilty

"Xian-gege says I'm a radish and he's planting me!" A-Yuan says delightfully.

"I'll give him a bath right now!" Wei Wuxian says swiftly, scooping the boy out from the pond as Wen Qing's gaze sharpens into an angry glare.

I swear she reminds me of Madam Yu whenever she glares like that. Maybe she really will be the perfect match for Jiang Cheng.

He brings A-Yuan to take a bath, splashing the boy playfully in the tub, causing him to giggle loudly. By the time they are done, Wei Wuxian is soaked in water himself. He dresses A-Yuan in fresh clothes first before changing himself. As he walks into the hallway, he spots a familiar figure.

"Lan Zhan, you're here! You should have sent me a letter!" Wei Wuxian wraps his arms around Lan Wangji.

"Xian-gege, who is this?" A-Yuan peeks out curiously from behind Wei Wuxian.

"Rich-gege," Wei Wuxian answers cheerfully.

“Wei Ying,” Lan Wangji begins. “Aren’t we his-,”

“Let’s go to my room,” Wei Wuxian interrupts before he could finish the sentence.

“Or Jiang Cheng will yell at us,” Wei Wuxian laughs. He takes Lan Wangji’s hand and pulls him towards a room in the far end of the hall. The interior of the room had been restored to its original state. Wei Wuxian had taken the liberty to rebuild most of his own room to the style he liked. Many of the disciples and builders were surprised at his handiness, but they didn’t know that Wei Wuxian had once spent over a year at the Burial Mounds farming and building run-down houses. After he got married to Lan Wangji at Cloud Recesses, he and his husband had done some reconstruction of the interior of the Jingshi, extending it so it would fulfill the needs of two people.

“Anyways, what are you doing here? Shouldn’t you be in Cloud Recesses helping to rebuild too?” Wei Wuxian asks.

“Wanted to see you,” Lan Wangji replies simply, his eyes softening in the way they always do when looking at Wei Wuxian.

“I missed you too. I would have snuck out, really. But I promised to help Jiang Cheng and I don’t intend on...you know, breaking it again. And besides,” Wei Wuxian laughs as he scratches his nose. “Jiang Cheng would have thrown me into the lake if he had caught me.”

“I wouldn’t let him,” Lan Wangji declares, reaching out to grip Wei Wuxian’s hand firmly. Wei Wuxian laughs and grasps it back. His Lan Zhan was always so protective.

“I wouldn’t care. I can swim. And we always did that to one another when we were kids.”

Lan Wangji gives him an exasperated look, then turns his gaze towards Wen Yuan.

“Wei Ying...A-Yuan he...”

Ah Lan Zhan, we can’t just say we’re his parents. Not yet at least. First, we will have to get Granny Wen and Wen Qing’s permission to formally adopt him.

“His family is here,” Wei Wuxian says. He lowers his voice. “For now, he will stay with his family. We’ll discuss adopting him later, alright?”

“Mn.” Lan Wangji nods. They help lay A-Yuan down in Wei Wuxian’s bed for his nap and then they slip to the other side of the room to talk

“Hey Lan Zhan,” Wei Wuxian says suddenly in a serious voice. “Do you think you can teach my Shijie cultivation? For music, I mean.”

“Music cultivation?” Lan Wangji tilts his head at him.

“Yes well..Shijie’s core has never been strong. The healers could never figure out why. I was planning for Wen Qing to take a look at her.”

“I will ask my uncle and brother about it. And Wei Ying.”

“Hmm?”

“I’ve regained my memories.”

Wei Wuxian gives him a confused look.

“We did Empathy.”

“No I mean...I’ve regained my *own* memories,” Lan Wangji says. Wei Wuxian blinks as he tries to register these words.

“A-ah? How?”

“I do not know,” He admits. “It happened in my dream a few nights ago. But some memories aligned with the ones you showed me. So it is believable for me.”

“That’s....interesting. I thought it was due to you activating the array and sending yourself back....I knew you’d want to come after me but your uncle would have stopped you.”

“Yes.” Lan Wangji nods. “But it seems as if Empathy helped to bring back my own memories.”

“Or if...your soul was transported back,” Wei Wuxian murmurs thoughtfully.

“Without activating the array? How?”

“I don’t know.” Wei Wuxian shakes his head. “I’ll have to question Huaisang about this. He’s a genius, but there’s no way an array this dangerous would have no flaws or consequences when activating it. I was the only one to activate the array that day, but Jiang Cheng somehow got dragged into it. I was surprised it wasn’t you.”

“You and Jiang Wanyin...you have a strong spiritual connection.” There’s a hint of envy in Lan Wangji’s voice and Wei Wuxian can help but laugh. *Lan Zhan regained his memories of his being married, so how can he still be jealous? You fuddy-duddy.*

“You mean my- his core? It’s been his for over thirteen years.”

“Yet he can unsheathe Suibian. Because the sword recognizes him as you.”

“Right.” Wei Wuxian nods awkwardly.

“He can also still wield Zidian despite the weapon knowing the core is yours. It recognized Jiang Cheng’s soul as well as your core. There’s a connection between his core and your soul.”

“But..but our connection,” Wei Wuxian begins but he stops. He didn’t want to admit that his bond with Lan Wangji was stronger, but in a way, he believed it was. After all, his once close relationship with Jiang Cheng in the old timeline had been broken to what they both believed to be beyond repair.

“Wei Ying, it doesn’t mean our connection isn’t strong.” Lan Wangji pulls him into his lap and leans his forehead into his. “What matters is that I’m here now and I *will not* let the past repeat itself.”

“ *We* won’t,” Wei Wuxian corrects him. “Even if it was you who’d been brought back, I-I’d been happy either way. Because I have the chance to fix everything...Jiang Cheng and I will have our sister alive and well. Wen Qing and Wen Ning will be alive. Jin Ling will have his parents.”

“It was meant to be. Fate has given us another chance.” Lan Wangji murmurs and shifts his head to kiss Wei Wuxian on the lips. Wei Wuxian deepens it, pulling Lan Wangji to the floor.

“Wait,” He whispers as Lan Wangji leans in again. “We should go to another room. A-Yuan is here.”

“We’ll wait until tonight then.”

Wei Wuxian smirks at this. Yes, it would indeed be a fun night tonight.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoyed this chapter and be sure to let me know what you think of it in the comments!

How was the convo between JC & LWJ? Did I portray JC's internal thoughts accurately? Drop a comment down below!

Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

With the extra hands at Lotus Pier, it was being rebuilt a lot faster than it had in the previous timeline. Of course, this time, Jiang Cheng had both Wei Wuxian and Wen Qing to keep things in order. As the restoration continued, Jiang's disciples were quick to see that the Wen remnants were to be trusted and were victims of the war just like they were. Seeing the way Wen Qing kept her people in order, Jiang Cheng can't help but think that she would make an amazing sect leader (or sect lady). Wen Qing was right; her people were extremely handy with building, organizing, and cleaning.

Jiang Cheng extends an invitation to Lan Wangji to stay at Lotus Pier for several nights in which he accepts. When that happens, the two of them spend too much time cooped up in Wei Wuxian's room and Jiang Cheng once again has to remind Wei Wuxian of his duties with a visit to his room.

"Wei Wuxian, are you two being shameless when you're not even married?" Jiang Cheng hisses. Wei Wuxian sticks his tongue out at him.

"Technically, we *are* and have been for a few years."

"Not in this timeline, you're not!"

"But-," Wei Wuxian begins to protest.

"No buts," Jiang Cheng retorts. "Nobody in this timeline besides me, you and Lan Wangji know that you two are husbands. And we won't be having any weddings until after we've finished rebuilding. Don't make our sects lose face, alright? At least, just don't act like this public."

"Alright, if that is what my sect leader wishes." Wei Wuxian bows and winks at him. "And do we really need to wait until after everything is rebuilt?" Jiang Cheng stares at him.

"Well...we did refuse to reinstate A-jie's engagement. What would he think if you two suddenly had a wedding?"

"That was A-jie's decision though," Wei Wuxian points out, his eyes flickering around uncertainly. "For her own engagement."

"Still I think it's best if we wait a bit longer," Jiang Cheng tells him. "We know Jin Zixuan will confess during the Phoenix Mountain Hunt, which is only three months from now."

"Ah right," Wei Wuxian snorts at the mention of Jin Zixuan. "Then I guess I'll just focus on my inventions then."

“Just make yourself useful,” Jiang Cheng replies. “And don’t make Lan Wangji do it for you. He’s here as a guest.”

“I can help,” Lan Wangji says firmly.

“Suit yourself then.”

Jiang Cheng returns to the courtyard to continue training the disciples and has one of them bring Wen Ning to him. The other boy seems nervous as he approaches him.

“Wen Qionglin.” Jiang Cheng speaks carefully. “My brother told me you were very skilled in archery. Archery is an important skill that is taught to the young disciples around this age. Would you like to help train them?” Wen Ning looks startled, blinking rapidly a few times before he bows his head.

“I-If Sect leader Jiang asks that of me, I would be honored to help train the disciples.”

“Good,” Jiang Cheng says briskly, nodding. “I’ll have our weapon specialist make a bow for you then. Feel free to go to him if you’d like anything specific.”

“T-thank you, Sect leader Jiang.” Wen Ning ducks his head again and walks away. Jiang Cheng watches him. It was so *weird* for Jiang Cheng to speak to him like this, like a friend. After all, he wasn’t as close to Wen Ning as Wei Wuxian was. He didn’t make friends as easily as him either. Everytime he looks at Wen Ning, he’s only reminded of Jin Zixuan’s death and him speaking one word at a time as he reveals the truth about Jiang Cheng’s golden core.

Jiang Cheng spends the rest of the early morning reading the letters sent from Carp Tower and Unclean Realm. To his surprise, he finds a letter from Jin Guangyao addressed to his brother. He tries his best not to open the letter himself and read the contents. He still didn’t trust that man and he didn’t know if he ever would. Instead, he reads the letter addressed to the both of them from Huaisang.

Dear Wei-xiong and Jiang-xiong,

Bicao has sent a reply back to me on Qin Su’s behalf. She’d gone to question her mother about Jin Guangshan and Madam Qin confessed. I do not know how this will affect the relationship between the Qin and Jin sect, but it will keep Qin Su away from Jin Guangyao. Anyways with that matter settled, I have more happy news! Although I will never be a fan of saber practice, I have established using spiritual fans. I haven’t told Da-ge yet, but I hope he will be happy since I am using at least some form of cultivation and my fans will no longer be sitting in my room for display. I had been working on the idea for the past month after Guanyin Temple, but since we’ve come back to the past, I haven’t had much time until now to complete my idea. We should discuss what we have to do next. The next big event is the Phoenix Mountain Hunt. I will actually try to attend this time. Oh and Da-ge says that Jin Guangshan has been asking constantly about how the Yin Iron got destroyed. He is aware that Wei Wuxian and my brother were the only ones with Wen Ruohan the night it was destroyed, so it will not take long for him to put the pieces together, especially after Jin Zixun

must have told him about Wei-xiong using some strange type of cultivation. Prepare for this confrontation well at the next conference meeting.

Your friend,

Nie Huaisang

Jiang Cheng finishes reading the letter, his head spinning. He stands up and leaves his office to find his brother.

“Wei Wuxian!” Jiang Cheng calls out to Wei Wuxian as he spots him in the hall. Lan Wangji, as expected, is sticking to his side.

“Yes?” Wei Wuxian blinks. Lan Wangji looks at him too, a look of question and suspicion in his gaze. Jiang Cheng narrows his eyes against it. He hates that look. As if Lan Wangji thought he would hurt his brother. *He had* hurt his brother.

“I need to borrow you from your husband for a few minutes.”

“Mn, alright.” Wei Wuxian nods, lets go of Lan Wangji’s hands and follows Jiang Cheng. They enter Jiang Cheng’s room and he closes the door behind him.

“Here.” Jiang Cheng hands him a folded piece of clothing and places a small box on top. He had been preparing to give it to Wei Wuxian ever since they started rebuilding. He watches as Wei Wuxian’s eyes widen once he unfolds the clothes completely.

“This is-,” He stutters.

“Keep your red undergarment if you want,” Jiang Cheng says. “But you, as my head disciple and right hand man, should wear Yunmeng colors. It’s only proper.” Furthermore, it would officially establish the fact that Wei Wuxian had a proper position in the sect and nobody would undermine it.

No longer would the other sects dare to whisper things about his brother being a ‘son of a servant’. This time, Jin Guangshan would not be able to easily drive a wedge between them.

“*Jiang Cheng*,” Wei Wuxian says again, his voice clouded with emotion. “I-.”

“Don’t get sappy with me,” Jiang Cheng snaps. “Just put them on, alright? And open the box as well.” Jiang Cheng shifts forward to help Wei Wuxian with the robes and place his new ones on. Then Wei Wuxian opens the box and inhales sharply when he sees the clarity bell inside. It’s the same one their sister had given to Wei Wuxian before. But at that point, Wei Wuxian had already left the sect. This time, Jiang Cheng had managed to recover it early. Jiang Cheng makes an impatient sound, grabs the bell from the box and ties it to Wei Wuxian’s waist, just next to where Chenqing sticks out from it.

“There.” Jiang Cheng looks his brother up and down, satisfied. He had always wanted to see how Wei Wuxian would have looked in Yunmeng purple robes. His mother had never allowed it then, refusing to fully acknowledge Wei Wuxian’s position as head disciple or accepting him as one of their own. Jiang Cheng and his sister had thought differently, though

they hadn't dared push on the issue in fear of facing their mother's wrath. Now as sect leader, he had the power to make his own decisions.

"You look great in purple," Jiang Cheng finds himself saying.

"Thank you." Wei Wuxian's voice is small but the gratitude from it reaches Jiang Cheng.

"Here, read this before you leave. Nie-xiong sent it to us," Jiang Cheng thrusts the pile of papers at him and waits, tapping his feet against the wood as his brother reads.

"He's right," Wei Wuxian says once he's finished reading. "Jin Guangshan will definitely question us at the next conference meeting. It's in a few days isn't it?"

"Yes. We'll have to make preparations," Jiang Cheng says. "And make sure that Lotus Pier is completely secure before we leave. Especially with Wen Qing and Wen Ning here."

"The defense arrays I've made should be completed. We'll just need to activate and test them out," Wei Wuxian tells him. "If anything happens, the talisman I'll place inside my robes will alert me."

"Is this the same ward you made at the Burial mounds?" Wei Wuxian gives him a look, then nods.

"This letter is for you too. Jin Guangyao sent it." Jiang Cheng hands him the letter. Wei Wuxian raises his eyebrows.

"Did he, now? I'll read it later then." He slips the letter into his robes.

"Jiang Cheng," Wei Wuxian says after a while. "You and Wen Qing..." Jiang Cheng's face flushes involuntarily.

"What about us?"

"You two would be great together," Wei Wuxian grins widely at him and Jiang Cheng elbows him in the ribs in response.

"*Shut* it," He sputters, feeling heat rush up his face.

"Ouch," Wei Wuxian whines and dodges away towards the door. "She kept the comb you gave her by the way." He sticks his tongue out once before disappearing around the doorway.

"She-," Jiang Cheng blinks at the empty space, his heart thrumming in his chest.

Of course she still has it...but will she give it back to me this time? Probably not, right?

No...she had no reason to. Jiang Cheng thinks. She gave it back to me last time because she knew I couldn't provide her and her family protection. But now...

Jiang Cheng finds himself lingering near Wen Qing's new healer infirmary for the rest of the day. There was no Chief healer at Lotus Pier, only their regular healer, Jiang Yueting with his

two medical assistants Jiang Lei and Jiang Feng. The three of them were quick to work together well with Wen Qing.

“We really gained a huge asset,” Jiang Yueting tells him one day. “Lady Wen is truly one of the most gifted healers there is. We were lucky that Sect leader Jin was fine with us being in charge of them.”

If it had been him, Wen Qing's gift wouldn't even have been put to use. She would have been thrown in the labor camps and tortured just because of her surname. Jiang Cheng had thought to himself.

“A-Cheng, do you want to speak with Lady Wen? You’ve been standing out here for a long time.” He starts at his sister’s voice.

“A-jie.” Jiang Cheng looks embarrassed and gives her a sheepish look. She smiles in response and gives him an amused look.

“If you want to talk to her, don’t be shy. I’m sure she won’t bite.”

Ha . Jiang Cheng thinks, remembering how fierce Wen Qing can truly be just by the look in her eyes. *Great...now I understand how Peacock feels when it comes to woman and romance and for fuck's sake, how can all three of us be so bad with love. Does it run in the family??*

“A-Cheng?” His sister is still looking at him.

“Ah...I just wanted to ask her about Wei Wuxian’s condition,” Jiang Cheng says quickly. “You know...regarding if he’s able to cultivate or not. I know she’s been seeing him and everything.”

“How *is* he? I know that idiot won’t tell me anything, so I wanted to go and ask Wen Qing myself.” His sister swallows, finally letting the worry glisten in her eyes.

“I’m worried about him. He hasn’t gained back the weight he’s lost from the Burial Mounds and it’s been almost a month since we came back to Lotus Pier...I’ve noticed he hasn’t eaten much.”

Oh..

Again, Jiang Cheng remembers he hadn’t known about this last time. He had remembered his brother’s pale face and sunken eyes after he got back from the war, but he didn’t know the full details of his health. And everytime he did try to ask questions, Wei Wuxian had evaded all of them. At the time, Jiang Cheng had been too frustrated to put up with his antics and had put almost all of his focus on rebuilding. Furthermore, he had assumed that his brother’s health had been unstable due to his constant drinking. Jiang Cheng sighs and pinches nose in frustration. His priorities had been so jumbled up last time. Why had he focused on rebuilding his sect alone and not his family at the same time? Has he really been so focused on rebuilding the sect that he hadn’t noticed his brother’s health deteriorating right in front of his eyes?

My sect got rebuilt but the bond between me and Wei Wuxian was falling apart at the same time...

“I asked him about it, but he told me he was fine,” A-jie continues. “I told Second Master Lan of my concerns and he said he’d make sure that A-Xian ate enough.”

“Good,” Jiang Cheng says. “If neither of us can convince him, I’m sure Lan Wangji can. The two of them are close.” Of course, Jiang Cheng knows, he can’t always rely on Lan Wangji. He had to do something himself this time.

Later that night at dinner, their sister smiles wider than ever at the sight of her younger brother in new robes and Lan Wangji (as always) can’t take his eyes off him.

“Lan Zhan, I’ve always wanted you to try Shijie’s soup! I’ve told you how amazing it is, haven’t I?” Wei Wuxian’s eyes gleam with excitement.

“Mn.” Lan Wangji sits and A-jie passes him a bowl with a smile.

“I’ve made a vegetarian version just for you. I hope it is to your taste.”

“Thank you, Lady Jiang.”

Jiang Cheng eyes his brother’s bowl which also seemed devoid of meat. Exchanging a glance with his sister, he knows she has noticed as well.

“A-Xian, have some more meat. I’ve noticed you haven’t been eating much lately.” A-jie moves to scoop more ribs into Wei Wuxian’s bowl. He only watches silently and nods in thanks.

They eat in silence, but he can tell Lan Wangji is watching Wei Wuxian with increasing concern in his eyes and A-jie is looking at him as well. But Wei Wuxian finishes his bowl, not leaving a single piece of meat in his bowl.

“Your soup is always the best, Shijie!” He tells her with eyes gleaming. “All of your cooking is amazing in general! Like these stir-fried spicy noodles.”

“I made those.” Jiang Cheng clears his throat.

“Did you now?” Wei Wuxian raises his eyebrows at him.

“I surprised Jie with my cooking skills.” Jiang Cheng laughs nervously. The only time he had cooked was when he had to take care of Jin Ling and when his nephew had begged him to make him his mother’s soup, the soup he never got to try.

“What’s surprising?” A-jie laughs. “I did teach you both how to cook when you were little. It wasn’t often though since Mother always made you both train and said that men like you should be in the training yard rather in the kitchen.”

“We have to draw wisdom from all places though,” Wei Wuxian protests. “What’s wrong with learning a skill like cooking? Besides, I made pretty good dishes myself, didn’t I?” At

this, Jiang Cheng can't help but splutter loudly, remembering the dishes that Wei Wuxian had made; they had practically been drowned in spices and Jiang Cheng remembered his throat being sore for almost the rest of the week. He opens his mouth to say a snarky remark, but his sister only laughs and pats the side of Wei Wuxian's head gently.

"Xianxian is always great at everything he does."

"A-jie, you should be honest with him." Jiang Cheng crosses his arms across his chest. "You spoil him too much."

"Hmph." Wei Wuxian sticks his tongue out at him and Jiang Cheng threatens to throw a steamed bun at him in response. After dinner, Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji disappear down near the docks to sit at one of the pavilions by the water. As Jiang Cheng watches them from a distance, he notices two people standing down by the pier. As he approaches, he makes them out to be Wen Qing and A-jie.

"Wen Qing, look. Isn't the water at Lotus pier so beautiful at night?"

"The weather here is a lot nicer than Qishan," Wen Qing replies. "More humid though."

"Do you like it better?"

"I do," Wen Qing says wistfully. "It's more peaceful. I haven't slept so well ever since my family and I used to live near Dafan Mountain."

"A-jie," Jiang Cheng almost feels bad disrupting them.

"A-Cheng, did you come out to see the view as well?" A-jie smiles. "Well, you can show her around, then? The pavilions are especially beautiful at night. A-Xian and Second Master Lan are already sitting in one."

"A-jie," Jiang Cheng begins, trying not to show the slight panic in his voice, but she's gone.

"Lady Wen." Jiang Cheng nods at her.

"You can call me Wen Qing." Jiang Cheng blinks.

"Your sister does and Wei Wuxian." Wen Qing's brows furrowed. "He called me 'Qing-jie'. Almost as if...he was used to it."

"Ah, I'm not sure what that's about," Jiang Cheng murmurs. "He's never called anyone 'jie' before. Even for our sister...it was just 'Shijie'."

"Why?" Wen Qing's eyes are questioning.

"My mother," Jiang Cheng bites out. "She never allowed it." He really doesn't have the energy to talk about his family issues tonight. Thankfully, Wen Qing doesn't push it and only nods. The two of them end up walking around Lotus Pier and Jiang Cheng is nervous.

“Wen Qing,” He says when he finally finds the courage to speak. “You’ve settled down well at Lotus Pier?”

“Yes. This is my first time at Lotus Pier and it’s so...different.”

“I’m glad you like it. It’s your home now after all.”

“Is it really? Are we not prisoners here?” Wen Qing’s question surprises me.

“Of course not!” Jiang Cheng exclaims. “What makes you think that? We only told the other sect leaders that so they would agree to let my sect take you.”

“Second Master Lan knows. Won’t he tell his brother?”

“Zewu-jun would not want the innocent to suffer. He knows the contribution you’ve given to us, as does Chifeng-zun.”

“I see,” Wen Qing says softly. “You’ve kept your word about protecting me. When you freed me from the dungeon, I did not expect you to go this far.”

“I owe you a great debt, Wen Qing...without you and your brother, the Jiang sect wouldn’t exist anymore.” The words come out so easy for him.

“Thank you.” Wen Qing turns towards him, a tenderness and softness in her eyes. Jiang Cheng swallows, his hand moving towards her without thinking when a noise up ahead makes him snatch his hand back. Wen Qing frowns, listening intently. Now that they’re standing still, they make out the sound to be gagging and coughing. It was coming from near the outhouse.

“Who’s there?” Jiang Cheng calls out sharply. The sound stops abruptly and they hear the sound of footsteps hurrying away.

“That was...strange,” Wen Qing says, her voice concerned. Jiang Cheng doesn’t reply and hurries after the direction of the footsteps. The path he takes leads him to Wei Wuxian’s door.

“Wei Wuxian?” Jiang Cheng pounds on the door. It opens and Jiang Cheng has to fling out his arms to prevent Wei Wuxian from collapsing on him. His hair is messy and drenched in cold sweat and he’s shaking.

“What’s wrong with you?” Jiang Cheng leads him over to the bed. “Are you hurt?”

“It’s nothing...I just had an upset stomach. I must have eaten too much.” Wei Wuxian waves his hands.

Too much ?

Jiang Cheng could, ever so slightly, feel the bones in his brother’s arms and feel how lightweight he was from leaning onto his shoulders. His sister’s words suddenly come back to his head.

“Where did Lan Wangji go?” Jiang Cheng frowns. They had been together just moments ago.

“I told him...I was going to get Chenqing. So we could play music together out in the pavilions. But I felt nauseous and dizzy on the way to my room,” Wei Wuxian murmurs. Jiang Cheng scowls at him.

“Stay here while I get Wen Qing. Don’t you *dare* get up.” Jiang Cheng opens the door to find Wen Qing already standing near the door.

“I’ll take a look at him,” She says briskly, stepping into the room. Soon after, A-jie and Lan Wangji arrive too.

“Wei Ying was taking too long. Wanted to find him myself.” His expression changes when he sees Wen Qing in the room.

“A-Cheng, what happened to A-Xian?”

“He said he had an upset stomach...” Jiang Cheng tells her. “And...he was throwing up.”

“A-Xian, is this true?” A-jie turns towards her other brother.

“Jiang Cheng,” Wei Wuxian begins, trying to sit up but Wen Qing pushes him back onto the bed.

“You don’t need to try and deny it,” She says sternly. “I can tell. Your heartbeat feels irregular and your jaw is swollen up. You really shouldn’t have hidden this from everyone. It could have turned serious.”

“Wei Ying,” Lan Wangji whispers, stepping closer now.

“Lan Zhan...” Wei Wuxian avoids his eye.

“I noticed the swollen lips, but I assumed it was from someone else.” Jiang Cheng gives Lan Wangji a pointed look who gives him a cold look in return.

“Jiang Chenngg,” Wei Wuxian whines, looking embarrassed, his face flushing red.

“I recommend that he eats a much lighter diet,” Wen Qing says, finally stepping away from the bed. Lan Wangji immediately takes her place by Wei Wuxian’s side. “Avoid meat for now. No alcohol or spices either. It won’t do any good for his stomach.”

“*Qing-jie* !” Wei Wuxian whines loudly. Jiang Cheng snickers under this breath which earns him a pouty glare from his brother.

“Listen to Wen-Daifu,” A-jie says, adding a stern undertone to his voice.

“Alright.” Wei Wuxian knows to be obedient when it comes to his Shijie.

“I’ll make you some porridge. So you won’t go to bed on an empty stomach.” A-jie stands and leaves the room.

“Lan Wangji, make sure he eats all of it, alright?” Jiang Cheng tells Lan Wangji. The man looks at him and nods, an unspoken message of agreement.

Chapter End Notes

- 1) YAY WWX IN PURPLE! I'm honestly salty and both the donghua and CQL for denying WWX of purple robes when he legit wore them in the canon novel
- 2) Some ChengQing (I may just make it a slow burn tbh)
- 3) WWX is kinda..not okay after the Burial Mounds. (Someone in one of the previous chapters mentioned possible cannibalism and I feel like it is canon, even if it is not explicitly said any adaptation...)
- 4) I'm kinda excited to write about JC and LWJ just trying their hardest to get along for WWX's sake but there's gonna be a lot of glaring and maybe some yelling? LOL...

Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

I was supposed to squeeze Jiang Cheng's official sect leader ceremony into the last chapter but I forgot. I'll just put it into this one, assuming he only did the ceremony after the period of mourning was over and most of Lotus Pier had been rebuilt (at least, the parts that the Wens destroyed).

Also, I added one more mini paragraph to the end of the last chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Jiang Cheng hated this. He hated that his brother had been trying to hide something from him *again*, after they'd promised each other they would talk. Could Jiang Cheng even trust him? He really hoped he could this time around. He paces around restlessly in Wen Qing's infirmary until she impatiently, but politely tells him to sit down.

"Wen Qing, how is he?"

"Sleeping. Yanli told you his appetite was poor, yes? Or that he wasn't eating enough."

"Yes..at dinner," Jiang Cheng's voice trails off, remembering his brother trying to eat more meat to hide the fact that something was wrong. He clenches his fist.

"The Burial Mounds..it affected his mind and body. It wasn't just the resentful energy. Some wounds can't be healed. They're not on the surface."

"For now, just make sure he drinks the medicine I've prescribed. It'll help with stomach pain. Having him drink tea rather than alcohol will help keep his mind as well. It takes more than just a few weeks to recover from a place like that," Wen Qing continues

"And also," She says hesitantly. "Some of his wounds from the Burial Mounds..or maybe it was before his core removal has resurfaced."

"What?" Jiang Cheng frowns. "Why?"

"Because the resentful energy keeping them hidden resided. He'll need to recover from those wounds as well."

"I'll give him as much time to recover as he needs then." Jiang Cheng walks back down the hall and into his bedroom. However that night, he finds himself unable to fall asleep, twisting and turning in his covers. By the time he finally relaxes, he can already hear the birds singing.

~

At some point in the night, Wei Wuxian wakes again in a cold sweat. The nauseating feeling in his stomach, thankfully, hadn't come back after eating the porridge his shijie had made. He

had thought that after resurrection, he would have gotten back to having healthy eating habits. But it turns out that the return to his old body had more effect on him than he had thought he would. It had brought back out the psychological trauma he had tried to get over and forget. Additionally destroying the Yin Iron during his timeline had also caused more damage than last time.

“Wei Ying,” A voice calls his name from the other side of the room. Wei Wuxian blinks into the darkness until he finds the golden eyes that he loved so much.

“I’m okay, Lan Zhan.” Lan Zhan steps closer, pushing a cup with water into his hands. Wei Wuxian takes it with a grateful smile and enjoys the warm liquid as it flows down his throat.

“Sleep now, my love. I will be on the other side of the room if you need anything.” Lan Zhan walks away and Wei Wuxian lies back down. However this time, he finds it difficult to fall back asleep. He can hear the restless spirits whispering in his ears, making his eyes jerk open every few seconds when he senses the cold shudder on his arms, as if they could touch him. Lan Zhan starts humming from the other side of the room. Wei Wuxian recognizes it instantly. He closes his eyes again, letting the music soothe his fears and anxiety. He falls into a deep sleep until late morning. After he awakens, he finds that his purple robes from last night had been cleaned and folded neatly onto his desk. He dresses quickly and as he does so, he feels a letter sticking out from his robes. It was the letter from Jin Guangyao that he had forgotten to read last night. He takes it out and reads the content.

To Young Master Wei, Head disciple Jiang

I am sure Huaishang has informed you, but my father has been inquiring about the amulet a lot recently. He asked me to investigate since he knows I was the only one with you in Nightless City that fateful day. In fact, he has ordered me to visit Lotus Pier myself to ask you about it. Somehow he has figured out we had become close after the Sunshot Campaign. You do not need to worry though, I have no intention of asking you to hand over your spiritual tool because I had thought a lot about our conversation together. I should hardly show filiaty and loyalty to a father who clearly doesn't value me as his son, even though my name proves that he does not see me as his own. I have noticed that there are indeed other people who see me as their friend and someone with value. Zewu-jun and ChiFeng-Zun are among such people and Jin Zixuan has put a lot of effort into making sure I am comfortable here

I must urge you to find a solution in case he will ask about it again during the upcoming conference meeting. If the amulet truly is like the Yin Iron, the other sects will not tolerate it being in the possession of Yunmeng Jiang. I do not see how it should belong to my father either; it was after all, created by you. I have something very important to discuss with you upon my arrival in Lotus Pier. It should be discussed with Sect leader Jiang as well. I dare not say any details in this letter in case it is intercepted, but we will talk as soon as possible.

Your friend,

Jin Guangyao

A friend. Wei Wuxian looks down at the closing signature. Perhaps his talk that day really did get through to Jin Guangyao.

I still need to be on alert . Wei Wuxian tells himself. It could easily be Jin Guangshan trying to use my trust with Jin Guangyao to try and get the amulet. I should find a way to destroy it.

He makes his way to the kitchen. Something delicious is cooking, something sharp with spice and not the nauseating scent of meat from last night.

“A-Xian, you should have told me. I wouldn’t make you eat the meat if it upset your stomach.” Shijie had said to him the other night. Wei Wuxian had ducked his head and hadn’t answered her.

How could I deny Shijie’s lotus root and pork ribs soup? It would upset her. It’s my favorite. It always has been. But now...I can barely eat the pork ribs anymore.

“A-Xian...” Shijie continues as if she could read his mind. “I love making this soup for you and A-Cheng. But it will upset me even more if you get ill, understand? Please do not force yourself to drink it for me.”

“Yes...” Wei Wuxian nodded. “Shijie....will I ever be able to eat it again?” His voice had come out small.

“Of course, A-Xian. A-Cheng has ordered the cooks to make light meals for you based on Wen Qing’s instructions and she’ll be your personal healer. The other healers...do not yet know about your core. Wen Qing will take care of you.”

Wei Wuxian sighs loudly and walks out from his room and towards the kitchen.

“A-Xian, you’re awake.” His sister smiles at him. He blinks in surprise when he sees Lan Zhan in the kitchen standing next to his sister.

“Lan Zhan? Are you cooking?” Wei Wuxian leans over to peek at what’s in the pot.

“Stir-fried vegetables with dried bean curd and mushrooms! One of my favorites!” He says in delight. He is happy despite there being no sign of any spice in the food

“There’s noodles as well.” A-jie tells him. “And more porridge from last night.”

“Wen Qing says it’s fine to eat these?” Wei Wuxian questions. Shijie nods.

“You should eat more to get your appetite back. As for meat...well...we will let you decide on when you’re comfortable eating it again.”

“Okay Shijie.”

Shijie settles down the plates onto the table and they all sit. Wei Wuxian plucks the bean curd and noodles onto his plates. His eyes drift over the bottle of spice longingly, but Shijie notices and swiftly takes it away before his hands could snatch it up.

“Shijieeee.”

“A-Xian, Wen-Daifu says you should not consume spice. Not yet at least.”

“Just a little bit?” Wei Wuxian pleads, trying to use his puppy eyes on her. This usually worked, but everyone knew what “a little bit” of spice was for Wei Wuxian.

“No.” Shijie’s voice is firm. Wei Wuxian gives up, not wanting to argue with his sister, and focuses on eating his food instead.

“A-Cheng says that they found more Qishan Wen refugees.

“Cultivators?” Wei Wuxian frowns.

“They fled Qishan long before the war started. They didn’t participate in the Sunshot campaign. They changed their identity and were hiding in the territory of minor and major sects,” Lan Wangji explains.

“Jiang Cheng...is fine with letting them join?” Wei Wuxian asks hesitantly. He knows Jiagn Cheng had agreed to protect the harmless Dafan Wens, but *cultivators* ...would he really be okay with it?”

“He says he wants to talk to you about it first.”

“I see.”

Wei Wuxian finishes his meal quickly and goes to look for Jiang Cheng.

“Jiang Cheng,” Wei Wuxian calls as he knocks on his brother’s office door.

“Come in.” Wei Wuxian steps into the room. Jiang Cheng is sitting at a table, shuffling papers around in deep concentration.

“Jiang Cheng, Shijie says you sent our disciples to find more Qishan Wen refugees.”

“I did,” His brother replies without looking up. Wei Wuxian swallows.

“Are you okay with it? Truly okay? Are the other disciples okay with this?” Jiang Cheng looks up at last.

“If they didn’t do anything wrong, why should they be punished? Our disciples aren’t going to attack elderly and children. Some of the Dafan Wens have vouched for those refugees. They were distant relatives, some were cultivators while others were citizens. But they went into hiding before the war started. It took some time for my disciples to find them because they were disguising themselves as ordinary citizens. They also thought we were looking to take them as prisoners.”

“How did you get them to come out then?”

“I brought Wen Ning with me.”

“Oh. I see...where are the refugees being kept?” Wei Wuxian knows they couldn’t casually bring them into Lotus Pier.

“For now, they’re being guarded near the border of Yunmeng. We caught them in Yiling and not in Qinghe or LanLing, so we have some jurisdiction over them.”

“I see. Did any of our disciples join the other sects in cleaning out the palaces in Nightless City?”

“No. They’re just there to raid goods,” Jiang Cheng replies with a scoff. “We managed to recover most of Wen Qing’s medical books from her Yiling office though. The rest of them that were left in Qishan must have been taken by the Jins by now.”

“They’re hypocrites,” Wei Wuxian snorts. “Back then, they claimed that all Wens were evil, yet they still made use of Wen Qing’s medical scrolls and notes.”

“They used your tools too.” Jiang Cheng gives him a pointed look. “But medical knowledge is useful wherever it comes from.”

“My inventions were plenty useful. What do you think is keeping your tea warm right now? And my inventions are bringing in profit for our sect treasury.”

“As long as you don’t use that money to buy alcohol.” Jiang Cheng crossed his arms.

“But what if we share it?” Wei Wuxian winks. “We can invite Nie-xiong and drink together.”

“Wen Qing says you can’t drink alcohol for the next couple of days. Or not until your appetite is back to normal.”

“Unfair,” Wei Wuxian mutters, already missing the delightful taste of Emperor’s Smile. “No spicy food either.”

“Don’t complain to me.” Jiang Cheng snorts. “She’s your doctor. I’m not going to tell her to allow you to have it either though. She knows what’s best. Now go away and stop bothering me. I have things to do.” Jiang Cheng waves his hand at him.

“What about me though?”

“You? You need to rest. Especially after what happened last night.”

“What? No, I feel fine,” Wei Wuxian protests. “Really. It’s not like I can’t run the disciples through their drills.”

“No.” Jiang Cheng’s voice is stern with the authority of a sect leader. “If you want to cultivate another core, your physical body needs to be strong again.”

“Jiang Cheng,” Wei Wuxian whines. “I can’t get strong by sitting around, can I?”

“You didn’t tell me that you haven’t recovered fully from the Burial Mounds. During the war.” Jiang Cheng’s voice is tight and the protest dies down Wei Wuxian’s throat.

“I-” Yes, he *did* have injuries before the golden core transfer and they had never healed properly after the fact. The scars on his back were from Zidian. Wei Wuxian had been too focused on trying to find a solution to Jiang Cheng’s core to even remember them or have

Wen Qing treat them and Jiang Cheng had remembered even less due to his mental state. After he came back from the Burial Mounds, he had only a few days of rest and he had not wanted to stay away from fighting by Jiang Cheng's side on the battlefield.

"Wen Qing didn't notice until you stopped using Demonic Cultivation, which was after we returned back to Lotus Pier. Since the resentful energy prevented her from seeing certain injuries. It resided and some of the wounds resurfaced."

"She wouldn't have noticed," Wei Wuxian says quietly. "After I came back from Nightless City, I mean. At that point, the resentful energy was keeping the injuries out of sight...it doesn't heal like spiritual energy but well..." Wei Wuxian can't bring himself to say it. To say that to stop using demonic cultivation so suddenly would surely lead to withdrawal symptoms. Perhaps what had happened last night was partially because of that. And it would most likely get worse. Moreover, it was more than just physical wounds he had to heal from. Being in a place like the Burial Mounds for three months would do more than just affect one's mental state.

"Wei Wuxian." Jiang Cheng's voice sounds almost pleading. Wei Wuxian was not used to his brother's voice sounding like this. The only times he had sounded so vulnerable was right after seeing his parents dead and after the reveal of his golden core at Guanyin Temple.

"Jiang Cheng?" Wei Wuxian's voice thickens with concern.

"We can't help each other if we don't *talk*."

Oh right...miscommunication was our biggest flaw in the original timeline. We can't make the same mistake again.

"It's not...a big deal," Wei Wuxian murmurs.

"Wei Wuxian!" Jiang Cheng hisses, getting to his feet now. Now *there* was the anger Wei Wuxian was familiar with. It made Wei Wuxian jump, but he tries to smile regardless. "It involves your damn health, of course it's a big deal!"

Wei Wuxian leans back against the wall. "What I wanted to say was, the resentful energy doesn't heal, but instead it simply stabilizes and maintains the wounds, preventing them from festering. In a way...it sort of kept the wounds in the same state since I got them, neither worsening or getting better."

"It kept you alive, didn't it?" Jiang Cheng's voice had softened again. Wei Wuxian closes his eyes. He had never wanted to tell the details of his experience in the Burial Mounds to anyone. He hadn't even told Lan Zhan, not even after they'd gotten married. Lan Wangji had never pushed for him to tell, knowing it would only bring up past trauma.

"It did." Wei Wuxian's voice trembles with each breath as he speaks.

Jiang Cheng goes quiet for a while.

“It may have saved you once, but you know you can’t continue using it.” He gives Wei Wuxian a hard look and Wei Wuxian nods. They both knew the consequences that would happen if he continued it, not just on his body and mind, but for everyone else they loved.

“I’m not sure if it’s that easy for me to stop,” Wei Wuxian sighs. “Do you really think I can...cultivate another core? At this age? Lan Zhan can play Cleansing to clear out some of the resentful energy in me, but it isn’t that simple to get rid of all of it.

“Wen Qing has experience on dealing with resentful energy. I’m sure she can remove it safely.”

“I have to figure out how to destroy the amulet as well.”

“You can worry about that later,” Jiang Cheng tells him firmly. “For now, if you want to join me in the discussion conference, then listen to what Wen Qing and I say.”

“Okay,” Wei Wuxian sighs. He didn’t want to miss the discussion conference either, especially when there were still things to discuss about the Wen refugees. “But I’m not going to be sitting around in bed all day. I promised I’d help you with sect duties, didn’t I? I don’t want to break my promise again.”

“Weren’t you just talking about how your inventions brought money to our treasury? And your tools have been useful for our disciples on nighthunts too.” Jiang Cheng doesn’t sound bitter or annoyed, but rather amused.

“Well, it’s a minor thing,” Wei Wuxian shrugs. “I’ve always made talismans and experimented with gadgets.”

“You’ve been helpful enough as long as you don’t sneak off to drink alcohol every day,” Jiang Cheng says dryly. Wei Wuxian grimaces at the reminder of his actions in the previous timeline. “You’ve been doing things with your inventions for the past weeks now, just continue them.”

“One gets bored of doing such things,” Wei Wuxian grumbles. “I know I’m brilliant-minded, but who can come up with new talisman ideas every single day?” Jiang Cheng gives him an exasperated look.

“Fine, you can help with the training,” Wei Wuxian’s eyes light up. “but,” Jiang Cheng continues. “*Only* by correcting their postures. You can help with the academic training as well. You’re good at it.” He sits back down.

“But just don’t let Wen Qing catch you doing anything she won’t approve of. I’m not saving you from her wrath.” Wei Wuxian grins in triumph and bows.

“Thanks, Jiang Cheng!”

“Whatever.”

“Before I go, I should tell you about this letter.”

Wei Wuxian tells him the contents of the letter and watches as Jiang Cheng's face turns grim. When he's done talking, Wei Wuxian slips out from the room, leaving his brother sitting at his desk with a troubled expression.

"Wei Ying." Wei Wuxian perks up at the voice.

"Lan Zhan," Wei Wuxian hurries towards him and hugs him tight.

"You were gone for a while. Wanted to come look for you."

"Jiang Cheng and I had...sect stuff to discuss," Wei Wuxian says. "I told him about the letter Jin Guangyao sent me. I should tell you about it too." Lan Wangji frowns deeply at the name.

"I don't trust him. I don't want you near him, Wei Ying."

"I know you're worried, Lan Zhan. But Nie-xiong and I will have him under control. I know he didn't do good things but...it's important that we keep an eye on him to prevent something terrible from happening again."

"Mn." Lan Zhan nods reluctantly. "I won't be playing for you today. I need to teach Lady Jiang Cleansing."

"Ah, don't worry about it, Lan Zhan. I'll go spend some time with A-Yuan. Also...will you stay one more night?"

"Mn. Okay."

~

Jiang Cheng doesn't like this one bit. Jiang Cheng keeps thinking about the content of Jin Guangyao's letter to Wei Wuxian as he paces the room restlessly. No matter what Wei Wuxian told him so far, Jiang Cheng still doesn't trust Jin Guangyao. That man was clever with his words and personality. He was still wary about letting his brother get close to him and risk getting hurt again. He can't help but let the words Jin Guangyao had said to him in Guanyin Temple drift back into his mind.

"If you had shown a better attitude toward your shi-xiong and it made it seem like your bond was too strong to come in between or to break apart or if you had shown more tolerance after everything that had happened, then things wouldn't have resulted as they did."

Jiang Cheng sighs. Jin Guangyao may be good at lying and manipulating, but he had been right that time. He had been too easily manipulated and let rumors drive him and Wei Wuxian apart. The rumors are still happening this time around, but he doesn't let it bother him.

"So what if Wei Wuxian brings merits to the sect? That's obviously a good thing. I have a strong person by my side, my right-hand man, brother, head disciple. As long as I can keep him by my side, I won't care."

There was a time he hated being second to Wei Wuxian and being compared to him. His father had praised Wei Wuxian more than he had and it had caused a rift between his parents. Worst of all, it had caused a rift between *him* and Wei Wuxian.

Jiang Cheng was mature now and wouldn't let those things bother him. His father, he knew had loved him, had wanted the best for him. His mother had loved him too, however harsh she had been. He had a lot more confidence than he did back then, especially with Wei Wuxian by his side who'd promised to support him. However currently, Wei Wuxian's current health has to recover and Jiang Cheng, however much he keeps Wei Wuxian's promise in his mind, knows he has to prioritize his brother's health first and foremost. He had given the task of leading nighthunts to another older disciple, Jiang Yunru, one that had survived the burning of Lotus Pier.

Wei Wuxian had taken A-Yuan and the new disciples down by the waters to pick lotus pods. Jiang Cheng hadn't realized how much he missed his brother's laughter. Lotus Pier, although had been rebuilt, was never the same without the presence of his siblings. It had become colder, quieter and more rigid. It had lost its liveliness and sunshine because Jiang Cheng had lost the people that came with it.

He turns his attention away from the waters and walks towards the training grounds instead. Wen Ning was carefully adjusting one of the disciples' stances, talking to him; Jiang Cheng was too far to hear them. They look over and give bows of acknowledgement as he walks by. As Jiang Cheng walks around Lotus Pier, he hears music coming out from his sister's room, soft voices talking.

Shouldn't he be spending time with Wei Wuxian? Jiang Cheng thinks, then quickly shakes the thought away. The two of them weren't even married yet and they were already being shameless. But then again, it's not like Jiang Cheng could possibly stop Wei Wuxian from spending time with Lan Wangji, even with the authority of a sect leader.

Later that evening, Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji, as expected, disappear into the large suite guest room almost immediately after a not-so-subtle bath together. However, he definitely did not expect to be woken up by screaming and panicked yelling.

"A-Xian!" His sister's panicked voice is enough to make him run out of his room. Some of the disciples who had been crowding outside of the room immediately moved to one side at Jiang Cheng's arrival.

"What's going on?"

"Wei Ying! Calm down! It's us!" Lan Wangji's voice rings out. Jiang Cheng, losing patience, pushes his way towards Wei Wuxian's bed.

"Somebody get Wen Qing!" Jiang Cheng snaps out the order, his eyes fixed on his brother who's crying out in pain and jerking under Lan Wangji's hands.. He hears someone scramble out of the room to obey, footsteps walking hurriedly away

“What happened? Is it a nightmare?” Jiang Cheng bit his lip. He had never seen his brother have a nightmare episode *this* bad, not even when he was very young. He’d only known about his nightmares about dogs. Wen Qing arrives swiftly, carrying her medical bag. With Jiang Yanli and Jiang Cheng holding his arms down, Wei Wuxian stops thrashing once Wen Qing puts the needles in their appropriate places. His movement still, but his face is twisted in pain.

“Take them out after half an hour,” Wen Qing tells them. “Tell me if anything happens after he wakes.”

“Is he just going to sleep like this?” A-jie asks anxiously.

“Only if necessary,” Wen Qing tells her.

“I’ll stay then,” Jiang Cheng says, looking at his brother’s face with an uncertain expression.

“I can look after him.” Jiang Cheng clenches his teeth as Lan Wangji stares up at him with an unhidden challenge in his eyes.

“Both then. We take shifts. I’ll take the other bed.” Jiang Cheng jerks his head towards the other bed behind them.

“A-Cheng...you have a lot of work tomorrow,” His sister begins. “Why don’t you let me?”

“A-jie, don’t worry about it. You should rest. I’ll watch him.” His sister leaves reluctantly. Wen Qing stays in the room, sitting next to the bed to monitor Wei Wuxian’s condition.

“His nightmares have never been this bad before,” Jiang Cheng says quietly. Wen Qing exhales a long breath.

“Not all the scars he has can be seen,” She replies, her voice dry. Jiang Cheng immediately understands

“The Burial Mounds.” His voice is hoarse. The Burial Mounds was a dark place, full of resentful energy that threatened to tear you apart every second. A cultivator would barely be able to survive that place let alone somebody without one. But Wei Wuxian had been there for three whole months.

Did this happen last time? Jiang Cheng thinks. He hadn’t been aware of Wei Wuxian’s deposition last time, but if his nightmares had been this bad, surely someone would have heard?

“Silencing Talismans,” Lan Wangji says suddenly. Jiang Cheng stiffens.

“What?”

“I just remembered...Wei Ying had talismans all over his bedroom walls and doors. They must have been Silencing Talismans.”

“He...” Jiang Cheng trails off, lost for words as he feels something tightening in his chest.

Of course. Jiang Cheng thinks. It wasn't that I didn't notice. He just took extra steps to make sure we wouldn't. He also kept avoiding me whenever I tried to ask him what was wrong so... Wen Qing sighs.

“He always does this, doesn't he? Hide his pain from others. He was never going to tell you or anyone else about the golden core transfer, I'm sure you knew that.” Jiang Cheng only nods numbly. Lan Wangji's eyes flicker briefly towards him.

“I'll be in my infirmary. You can take the needles out yourself later.” Now Jiang Cheng and Lan Wangji are the only ones in the room accompanying Wei Wuxian.

“Did he...did he have nightmares at Cloud Recesses?” He asks in a hesitant voice. Lan Wangji's eyes move towards him again. His expression is blank and stoic as always. It's the most calm Jiang Cheng had seen Lan Wangji act towards him. In fact, the both of them were being surprisingly civil.

“They were frequent in the beginning. Sometimes, he'd slip away in the middle of the night after having one. Every time I tried to ask him about it, he changed the subject. After a while, I stopped pushing.”

“Why?” Jiang Cheng mutters. “If you don't push...you'll never know what he's thinking or how he's feeling.”

“I didn't want him to bring up painful memories. He had been burdened enough by them,” Lan Wangji replies.

*I had my fair share of painful memories....yet it's not like I **had** anyone to talk to about then.*

“Maybe some things shouldn't be pushed to be talked about,” Jiang Cheng agrees reluctantly. “But if he doesn't talk about them, we won't be able to help him. He'll keep the pain locked up inside and hide his hurt. He'll push everyone away.”

Lan Wangji is silent. Jiang Cheng knows they'd both experienced it once. In the first timeline, Wei Wuxian had refused to go to Gusu, creating chasm in his and Lan Wangji's relationship. Of course, he had pushed Jiang Cheng away too. This time, they were both holding on the best they could, Jiang Cheng especially.

Early the next morning, Lan Wangji reluctantly leaves Lotus Pier to return back to Gusu. He, too, had to help rebuild his sect and Cloud Recesses, and couldn't afford staying another day. He caresses Wei Wuxian's hands gently and plants a soft kiss to his head before leaving. Out of habit, Jiang Cheng glares at him and Lan Wangji returns on, holding his gaze until A-jie comes between them and they escort Lan Wangji out.

In the afternoon, Jiang Cheng dresses himself up for the succession ceremony. Wei Wuxian had dressed up as well and Jiang Cheng hadn't had the chance to ask him about last night. He stands by Jiang Cheng's side during the ceremony this time while A-jie stood at his other side. Wei Wuxian stands upright and smiles at him as if nothing had happened last night, but

being close to him, Jiang Cheng can see the fatigue in his face and dark circles under his eyes. He would have to wait until after to speak to Wei Wuxian. Wen Qing and her family were standing far off to the side, barely in view, as if unsure of their presence at such an important event. Jiang Cheng finds the courage to meet Wen Qing's eyes and nod at her, giving permission. They came closer, but as much as they'd allow themselves. Jiang Cheng steps forward and addresses the disciples of Yunmeng.

"I, Jiang Cheng," Jiang Cheng says, his voice ringing out across the courtyard, "as the son of Jiang Fengmian and Yu Ziyuan, from now on, officially succeed as Sect Leader of the Yunmeng Jiang sect. The motto of the Yunmeng Jiang sect is to attempt the impossible. As long as I am still breathing, I'll devote myself to the core value of our clan. I won't allow another disaster to happen to the Yunmeng Jiang sect again."

The disciples kneel and bow. "Sect leader Jiang!"

Chapter End Notes

Sorry, this update took a while. I somehow hit a major roadblock with my writing and I kept being unsatisfied with the chapter (mainly the convo between JC and WWX). I might go back to edit it later.

I hope you liked this chapter, give me your thoughts in the comments!

Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

I realized I gave WWX two bad nights in a row :’)) but fear not! He has more people tending to him this time! Also I had to ask around for what other duties WWX has to do as head disciple. I might have made him a bit too relaxed? Idk. JC is giving him light work anyways so *shrug*. But like in this chapter, I’ll write a bit more about WWX’s duties (I kinda suck at writing the politics-side of duties though which is why i haven’t written convos between jc and other sect leaders over trade and whatnot)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Wei Wuxian can’t remember much of what happened last night, but the worried look his shijie had given him that morning at breakfast told him enough that he had had another night of restless sleep. Jiang Cheng had been giving him looks too, watching him with careful eyes with those subtle hints of concern. Wei Wuxian busies himself with his duties to avoid being interrogated by Jiang Cheng, even if he knows it’d eventually be inevitable. He sits at his desk and sorts out the seemingly endless piles of letters to Jiang Cheng. He wrinkles his nose at the one sent by Sect leader Yao and places it into Jiang Cheng’s pile.

Sorry not sorry, ChengCheng, but you’re going to be the one to deal with Sect leader Yao.

He then writes a reply to Nie Huaisang’s letter, then Jin Guangyao’s. He can see from the piles of letters that Jin Guangshan had sent a letter to Jiang Cheng, that was sure to have the contents of him inquiring about the amulet. He would let Jiang Cheng handle Jin Guangshan and he himself would handle Jin Guangyao, he thinks decisively. There were two letters from Gusu, one from Zewu-jun and another from Hanguang-jun, one addressed to Jiang Cheng and another to him. He sets aside Lan Zhan’s letter and goes to deliver the rest of the letters to Jiang Cheng.

“You’re making me respond to Sect leader Yao, aren’t you?” Jiang Cheng grumbles as soon as he sets down the letters.

“Shouldn’t you be used to it?” Wei Wuxian asks teasingly.

“Oh, you shut up!” Jiang Cheng throws a brush at him, which he swiftly dodges. “Maybe I should *make* you know how it feels to deal with a sect leader like him!”

“He can’t be as bad as he was thirteen years later, right?”

“No, he was far worse,” Jiang Cheng replies drly. Wei Wuxian grimaces at this.

“Can’t wait to see his expression when he sees me in Yunmeng robes. People are too used to seeing me wear red and black.”

“There shouldn’t be anything to be surprised about. As my head disciple, you should obviously be wearing them.”

Wei Wuxian lets out a soft laugh. “Right, of course. But it’s still a new look. People may ask questions.”

“There’s nothing to question. Everyone knew my father made me your head disciple. We’re just making it more official. Also, there’s something else I wanted to do.”

“What is it?”

“I was...going to make you heir.”

“Wait...what?” Wei Wuxian stares at him in shock.

“Father already wrote down on the sect registry...that you were only a rank below me. Technically, that’d make you the second heir. Father just never announced it publicly.”

“I...” Wei Wuxian had never imagined Uncle Jiang would do that.

“You still want to marry Lan Wangji, I know that.” There’s a hint of grudge in Jiang Cheng’s voice. “You’re still going to leave Lotus Pier. I can’t stop that from happening, no matter what timeline we are in.”

“Jiang Cheng...”

“If we can negotiate something...have Lan Wangji marry into the Jiang sect, that could be a solution,” Jiang Cheng continues. Wei Wuxian swallows. He didn’t want to leave Jiang Cheng’s side again, he really didn’t. But his life in the Jingshi with Lan Zhan, seeing A-Yuan grow up to be Lan Sizhui, could he abandon that dream? Maybe...things wouldn’t be that different if A-Yuan grew up as Jiang Yuan and he and Lan Zhan found happiness in Lotus Pier together.

“I wouldn’t mind that,” Wei Wuxian says at last, finding his voice. “But Jiang Cheng...even if I am at Gusu again, I won’t ever forget this place. It’s my home too.”

“Of course it is!” Jiang Cheng scowl. “If you want to run off to Cloud Recesses, then do it, but if you don’t visit, I’ll personally break your legs and drag you back here myself.” Wei Wuxian smiles at the familiar anger and annoyance in his younger brother’s voice.

“You’ll stay as head disciple too. Don’t think you can get away with helping me run the sect!”

“Of course, Jiang Cheng. I wouldn’t dream of it. Speaking of which, I will go back to them right now. I have to finish writing out the training schedules.”

“You go do that. Sect leader Yao will be coming soon to discuss hunting disputes. I’m assuming you’ll want to make yourself scarce.”

“Yikes,” Wei Wuxian mutters. “I’ll make sure Wen Qing and her family will stay out of sight as well.”

He slips out of the office and returns back to his room. He finishes writing and designing the training schedules and goes outside to observe the disciples outside as they practice their sword formation.

“Keep your arms straight.” He moves to adjust the arm of one disciple. “Shoulders back.”

“Thank you, Da-shixiong.”

He walks around to see each of their stances. Then moves on to where the archers were training.

“Wen Ning!” Wei Wuxian calls upon spotting his friend.

“Young Master Wei!” his friend greets back.

“Jiang Cheng really did put you in charge of archery training. How has that been going? Have the disciples been listening well to you?”

“We have, Da-shixiong. Young Master Wen is really good at it!” A disciple responds.

“That’s right, Wen Ning really is one of the best. Why don’t you let me take over? You should take a break.”

“Th-thanks, Young Master Wei.”

“You can just call me Wei-xiong. We live together after all. Don’t worry about the formalities.” Wei Wuxian picks up one of the stray bows and tries it out. Wen Ning watches him carefully from the side with worried eyes. Wei Wuxian used to love shooting kites here with the younger shidies. He and Jiang Cheng often spent hours here, trying to see who could shoot the farthest.

After a while, Wei Wuxian can already feel his arms straining and energy leaving him so he puts down the bow with a sigh. He would need to recover more of his energy before the Phoenix Mountain Hunt. He goes to a small courtyard near the back of Lotus Pier to test out his new inventions instead. He’d been working on a new explosive talismans, the ones you throw at enemies when you want to make a quick escape. As he begins drawing out the symbols onto the talisman, he accidentally makes a mistake and ends up having the talisman nearly explode in his face and he ends up having to run out of there, coughing from the smoke.

“Not a good idea to test *that* out in my room,” He mutters to himself as he brushes off the ashes from his robes.

“What the fuck, Wei Wuxian?” Wei Wuxian rubs away his dust near his eyes to see Jiang Cheng scowling at him from the end of a hallway. He must have heard the explosion and rushed here in a panic.

“Uh, hello to you too.” Wei Wuxian waves a hand sheepishly. “I was just testing out my inventions, don’t worry about anything.”

“Everytime you say that, I can't help *but* worry,” Jiang Cheng’s scowl deepens. “We heard explosions and thought someone was attacking us.”

“I...” Wei Wuxian scratches his nose. “I’ll test out my inventions outside of Lotus Pier next time.” He chuckles nervously as Jiang Cheng continues to glare at him.

“A-Xian,A-Cheng, it’s time for lunch.” Their sister’s gentle voice breaks the tension between them. Wei Wuxian immediately takes this as a chance to fling an arm over Jiang Cheng’s shoulders.

“How was Sect leader Yao? Did you have a nice, fun conversation with him?”

“Oh, you shut your mouth!”

“Boys,” Shijie scolds. “Come eat. Fight later. I’ve asked Lady Wen and her brother to join us so please be civil.”

“Yes, Shijie.”

“Okay, A-jie.”

Halfway through eating, Wei Wuxian sees Jiang Cheng staring at him and hears him snicker under his breath.

“What?”

“Your eyebrows..I think they’ve been misplaced.”

“What?” Wei Wuxian yelps and his hands fly up to his face. No, his eyebrows were still there, though they seemed thinner than usual. Wei Wuxian throws Jiang Cheng a reproachful look. His brother ignores it and focuses on eating his meal.

“Shijie, are my eyebrows fine? I may have burned some of it off while experimenting today.”

“Well,” Shijie leans in to observe his face. “They do seem...thinner.”

“Ugh,” Wei Wuxian groans and pinches his nose. “It’s not funny, Jiang Cheng!” He picks up one of the rice cake snacks, poised to throw it before remembering Wen Qing and Wen Ning’s presence at the table. He pops it into his mouth instead. Wen Ning blinks at him while Wen Qing gives him an unimpressed look.

“So uh,” Wei Wuxian begins awkwardly, trying to start a conversation. “Jiang Cheng and I will be going to a discussion conference in a few days. To talk to the other sects about what to do with the rest of the Wens.”

“My family is safe with me already,” Wen Qing answers calmly. “That is what mattered to me the most.” She pauses, her eyes calculating as they flicker back and forth from Wei

Wuxian and Jiang Cheng. “A-Ning told me you scouted out some of the cultivators that were loyal to us.”

“Yes,” Jiang Cheng answers her. “Well...I was thinking that they could join us as long as they were the ones that didn’t participate in the war. And if they promise to stay loyal.”

“We *do* need cultivators,” Wei Wuxian adds. “So far, we’ve only recruited some rogue cultivators and people from around the area of Meishan. As long as they’re loyal, do you think the other sects will object?”

“It’ll be hard to tell who’s lying just to avoid being executed,” Jiang Cheng says dryly.

“Oh...I have a solution for that. A truth talisman!”

“A what?” Wen Qing frowns. “Those exist?”

“They do now,” Wei Wuxian tells her. “I made them.”

“How do they work?” Shijie asks, genuinely curious.

“It involves...a blood oath. Just a small prick. And they need to keep their finger on the talisman. If it turns black, it means they’ve told a lie.”

“A-Xian do..all your talismans involve drawing them with blood?” Shijie asks, worry slipping into her voice.

“It’s...not a lot. I have blood-replenishing talismans.” Wei Wuxian reassures her. “We should talk about it later.”

“That’s right,” Jiang Cheng clears his throat. “Are you going to say anything about what happened last night?” An awkward silence immediately fills the room.

“A-Cheng.” Shijie gives him a firm shake of her head but Jiang Cheng presses his lips together and gives Wei Wuxian a hard look.

“I don’t remember,” Wei Wuxian admits. “I don’t dwell on nightmares. I try not to. Was it...bad?”

Wen Qing, Shijie and Jiang Cheng all look at him then at the table.

“No, not really,” Jiang Cheng murmurs, not sounding convincing at all.

“Aiya, nightmares are normal, Jiang Cheng. Why are you so worked up?” Wei Wuxian swings an arm around Jiang Cheng’s shoulders but the other man shrugs him off with an annoyed huff.

“You *scared* A-jie last night,” Jiang Cheng says roughly. Wei Wuxian freezes and looks over at his sister’s worried expression.

“I had to use needles to calm you down,” Wen Qing cuts in.

“That’s...” Wei Wuxian trails off. He had dreaded that something like this would happen. His nightmares had gotten increasingly more frequent after returning from the Burial Mounds, then fighting in the war. The last thing he wanted was to talk in detail about them.

He finally finds his voice and takes a shuddering breath. “I don’t want to talk about it. I *can’t*.” Jiang Cheng stands up, eyes narrowing in frustration, but sits back down when Shijie puts a hand on his shoulders.

“A-Cheng, don’t push him,” She says. “It may bring back...unhappy memories.”

“But A-jie, I’ve told him so many times to just *talk* to us,” Jiang Cheng says loudly. “Does he not understand we want to be there for him?” He looks Wei Wuxian straight in the eyes as he speaks.

“I *do* understand, Jiang Cheng,” Wei Wuxian says quietly. “But I can’t talk about *that*. I don’t think you will like what you hear, even if I did tell you.” Wei Wuxian watches as Jiang Cheng’s anger fades away to concern and confusion. His sister looks away, her eyes distraught. The little amount of appetite Wei Wuxian had had dissolved. He stands up and walks away from the table without another word. He walks down to one of the pavilions and sits down at one of the stone chairs. He closes his eyes for a while, letting himself inhale the freshness of the water around him. Then there’s footsteps behind him.

“Jiang Cheng, I want to be alone,” Wei Wuxian says tightly without looking around.

“Y-Young Master Wei. It’s me.”

“Oh.” Wei Wuxian turns to see Wen Ning standing there.

“Are you alright?”

“I’m fine,” Wei Wuxian tells him, though he fails to make his voice sound convincing.

“W-when Jiejie heard what Wen Chao did, she was so worried. She didn’t want to believe it. She asked Sect leader Jiang about your whereabouts and when he didn’t know where you were, her fears only got confirmed.”

“I wasn’t going to tell anyone,” Wei Wuxian says quietly. “Especially not when...nobody knew I didn’t have a core.”

“I thought you would have done anything you could to prevent Sect leader Jiang from finding out but-,” Wen Ning pauses, biting his lips.

“Jiang Cheng is smart. He would have found out,” Wei Wuxian murmurs.

“I see...” Wen Ning says slowly. “How did he take it?” Wei Wuxian remembers the breakdown Jiang Cheng had had in Guanyin Temple. It felt like a lifetime ago, but the memory was as clear as if it had happened yesterday.

Not well at all...but I can believe that he’s accepted it now. In a way that I never expected from him

“As well as you would expect,” Wei Wuxian replies truthfully. “I’ll go back now. I don’t want Shijie to worry and I’m sure Wen Qing will be wondering where you are.”

“Dashixiong! Young Master Wei!” A disciple hurries towards them. Wei Wuxian stands and Wen Ning scrambles hastily to his feet as well.

“What is it?”

“Lianfeng-zun and Young Master Jin are here.”

“Oh.” Wei Wuxian turned to Wen Ning. “It may be best if you stay out of sight. Go back to your quarters through the other side, alright?” Wen Ning nods and walks off at once. Wei Wuxian walks back to the front courtyard where the two Jin men were waiting for them.

“Lianfeng-zun, Young Master Jin,” Wei Wuxian greets both of them politely.

“Young Master Wei,” They return the greeting.

“I didn’t expect you to visit so soon.”

“You received my letter, yes?” Jin Guangyao smiles. Jin Zixuan looks from his half-brother to Wei Wuxian in confusion.

“Since when did you two write to one another?” He asks.

“We’re friends. We talked a few times in Cloud Recesses. We helped kill Wen Ruohan together. It’d be strange if we didn’t form some sort of bond after that.”

“Right,” Jin Zixuan says slowly. “Anyways,” He clears his throat. “I came to speak with Sect leader Jiang. About the Phoenix Mountain Hunt.”

“Ah, I assume you’re here to ask about my sister? To invite her?” Wei Wuxian inquires.

“Yes, I mean no...my mother is the one who wants her there,” Jin Zixuan stammers a response. Wei Wuxian surpasses the urge to roll his eyes. Love seemed like such an easy thing to come by yet at the same time it wasn’t. The memory of Jin Zixuan running away after admitting that *he* was the one to invite Shijie was still fresh in his mind from the previous timeline.

“Of course,” Wei Wuxian says. “My brother will be out soon. The disciples have informed them of your arrival already. Come sit in Sword Hall while you wait for him.” He glances over at Jin Guangyao who looks back at him with a calm expression. “I need to speak with your brother as well. I believe we have things to discuss.” They leave Jin Zixuan in Sword Hall while Wei Wuxian leads Jin Guangyao to the far inner side of Lotus Pier where they sit down at one of the pavilions. A servant soon comes to bring them a teapot and two cups. Wei Wuxian puts the teapot and cups to one side and takes out a board of weiqi from his qiankun pouch. He sets up the board and the pieces, handing the black ones to Jin Guangyao without talking.

“Lianfeng-zun, do you have something to talk to me about?” He gestures to Jin Gungyao to make the first move. Jin Guangyao looks from him to the board before he places down a

black stone.

“My father has put me and Jin Zixun in charge of handling the remaining Wen remnants.” Wei Wuxian stiffens. Last time that had happened, Jin Guangyao had used several of the Wens as human targets during the Phoenix Mountain Hunt. He had done it to please his father at the time, but the other sects had clearly shown their displeasure of the situation, even if they hadn’t spoken up. There had also been the horrors committed in the labor camps where innocent lives had been slaughtered. He takes a deep breath and puts one of his white pieces on the board before looking up again.

“And? Why are you telling me this? And not Jiang Cheng?” Wei Wuxian asks, his voice careful and calm.

“Jin Zixuan will tell him. I wanted to tell you myself,” Jin Guangyao replies. He puts down a black piece.

“Oh...so Jin Zixuan knows about the camps as well then?” Wei Wuxian says thoughtfully.

“Yes?” Jin Guangyao blinks. “Why wouldn’t he know about them? The other sects know we are keeping the Wen remnants under our close watch.”

Right, Wei Wuxian thinks. But they are unaware of the conditions of the camps.

“What did you discuss with Zewu-jun and Chifeng-zun about how you’d deal with the Wens then?” He puts down a white piece.

“We agreed to punish all cultivators involved in the war and have the women, elderly and children isolated,” Jin Guangyao explains. “But one day, Young Master Nie stumbled upon the location of the camps and he claimed they were abusing the prisoners there. He claimed to have seen elderly and women being forced to do hard labor and that there were even children there!”

Wei Wuxian blinks, his eyes widening in surprise.

Nie Huaisang went to Qionggi Path? He never told us. But perhaps he’s the only one who can go there without causing suspicions, since he isn’t exactly a cultivator....

“He even brought his brother along the next time to prove his word!” Jin Guangyao continues as he puts down a black piece. “Now Da-ge is quite furious with Father and even with me.” Jin Guangyao shakes his head lightly. “I didn’t know Zixun would do such a thing. I was never a supervisor there, I only helped to set the camps up and that was it.” He

“It is indeed troubling. I assume it will be brought up during the conference meeting.”

“Da-ge will definitely bring it up. He may despise the Wens, but he values justice. He will not stand by and let innocent, elderly, women and children be slaughtered.”

“What are your opinions?” Wei Wuxian asks carefully. “About what your Father did.” Wei Wuxian looks down at the board, observing the already placed pieces for a few seconds before putting down his next stone.

Jin Guangyao hesitates.

“I-I do not agree with him...not with hurting innocents. But,” He pauses. “The Wens can’t be left off.”

Black piece.

Then white.

And black again.

“No,” Wei Wuxian says, deciding not to mention Wen Qing and her family. “But they must be treated fairly.”

“Young Master Wei...” Jin Guangyao says slowly, biting his lips. “Before you said things...about my father and me trying to get his approval. The truth is...his approval is something I want more than anything else..because of my status...but,” He pauses. Wei Wuxian looks back at him expectantly.

“You were right..I do not think he will ever approve of me. I can read people very well and...he seems to be trying to use me rather than accept me. He tried to put all the blame of the labor camps onto me and Jin Zixun when the truth came out.” Jin Guangyao stares down at the table, rubbing a black stone between his two thumbs.

“You’re smart,” Wei Wuxian says as he puts down his next move, causing Jin Guangyao to shoot his head back up in surprise. “Chifeng-zun and Zewu-jun knew it. Even *Wen Ruohan* acknowledged it. That was why you became such a valuable spy. Your father knows it but,” Wei Wuxian sighs. “He doesn’t appreciate it. He only wishes to use it to his own benefit. I would think a father would be quicker to appreciate such intelligence in their own child before other people. But it seems like your father is too interested in blood ties and heritage. Even for me...” He pauses and lets out a sigh. “I may have been a well-respected young master, but that didn’t stop people from trying to make me feel lesser and know my place.”

“Are you talking about the late Madam Yu?” Jin Guangyao inquires. Wei Wuxian doesn’t answer. He didn’t have any hint of bitterness towards Jiang Cheng’s mother, no matter how she had treated him.

“I never wanted to disrespect her wishes,” Wei Wuxian says. “Because I owed the sect too much. If the late Sect leader Jiang hadn’t taken me in and found me, I wouldn’t be here. I wouldn’t have gotten the same chance other cultivators had.”

“What about what *you* wanted?” Jin Guangyao presses. He places down his next piece then looks up at Wei Wuxian expectantly. He starts at the realization that his own words are being repeated back to him.

“My duty was to protect Jiang Cheng and stay by his side as his subordinate and right-hand man. It was what I wanted as well.” Wei Wuxian smiles and takes a sip of his tea from the table. Then places down his next piece onto the board. Looking at the arrangement of the pieces, they were close to tying.

“I can tell that Sect leader Jiang and Lady Jiang have always considered you as their brother, not as their servant or subordinate. Many people already know how close you three are.”

“We are indeed close,” Wei Wuxian agrees with a smile. “My shijie and I are so close that people make *those* kinds of assumptions about us.” Wei Wuxian shakes his head with a light scoff. “Jiang Cheng and I...well, we have our differences, but we are family all the same. Despite this, I’m sure Nie-xiong is really the only one that knows we consider our relationship as one that runs deeper than one between martial siblings.”

“Huaisang is my friend as well, but after I left, he seemed...distant.” Jin Guangyao’s smile drops.

“Do not blame him too much. The war has affected all of us. Give him time to heal,” Wei Wuxian tells him. “Chifeng-zun and you are now sworn brothers. So in a way, you have the chance to be closer to Huaisang as well. Do not lose the chance to keep the ones who care about you close.”

“Thank you for your advice again, Wei-xiong.”

“It was a pleasure, Jin-xiong. We will see one another again soon.”

“We can finish our chess game next time, Wei-xiong. I look forward to seeing who is the winner.”

Chapter End Notes

Basically in this chapter, JGY finds out his father won't love him way way sooner than in the original novel/show all bc of WWX. So he may or may not be planning for his father's death way sooner...we will have to see ahaha. I feel like just making wwx ditch the whole "he has to die to right way" mindset bc JGS is a scumbag and he deserves to die in the worse way possible (though his death in the novel was already quite...disturbing)

By the way, I have another time travel fix-it fic planned. I just won't be posting it in a very long time until I've finished one or two of my other wips. Which...uh I haven't worked on much bc I've been super invested in this one and 'Rewrite the stars'.

EDIT: So I added some things to JGY's & WWX'S convo. I just had them playing a game of Weiqi (Chinese chess) while they played. Nothing super important but I thought it'd be kinda symbolic?? Considering what their convo was about

Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

Surprise fast update this time! Hurray!! I had some fun writing this chapter! It's pretty much angst-free (except for like one or two lines)

Another note:

So I only remembered the whole soup incident between JZX and JYL after I read the most recent manhua chapter and I realize I didn't really write it into this story. So let's just say it happened while WWX was in Nightless City. He just wasn't there to interfere and neither was JC. Neither of them thought much about the soup incident because WWX knows that JZX will eventually fall in love with their sister anyways.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“So Lianfeng-zun told you that your father had labor camps set up?” Jiang Cheng asks, staring at Jin Zixuan.

“Yes. I was aware that my sect was keeping the Wen remnants in check, but not like *this*,” Jin Zixuan shakes his head in disbelief. “I am glad that you were able to find Wen Ning and Wen Qing before they suffered the same fate.”

Me too. Jiang Cheng thinks quietly. At one of the tables, A-jie takes a shuddering intake of breath, still shaken from the details given about the labor camps. Jiang Cheng swallows, wishing he could shield her from the horrors of the atrocities the Jin sect caused, but he also knows that the more people who knew about it, the better it was to find a way to protect any remaining innocent Wens that were left.

“Wen Qing contributed to the Sunshot Campaign through the medical assistant she provided to soldiers and disciples of all sects. Her deal with us was that her family would be protected. If your father tried to force her to be punished, the other sect leaders would have had something to question about the kind of justice the Jin sect were to impose upon the remaining Wens,” Jiang Cheng says quietly.

“She also saved me and my brothers,” A-jie adds quietly. “We are indebted to her for what she's done for us.”

“My father is currently facing criticism from the other sects right now,” Jin Zixuan says. “So him being made into Chief Cultivator will not be as likely now.”

“I see.” Jiang Cheng nods. Jin Guangshan had been made into the Chief Cultivator in the original timeline simply because the Jin sect was the one with the strongest standing after the

war and was the only one capable of lending his help to all minor sects while the other three sects recovered and rebuilt.

“Jiang Cheng. I finished speaking with Lianfeng-zun.” Wei Wuxian bows as he enters the hall.

“Great, I told Sect leader Jiang about the labor camps. I’m assuming A-Yao did the same.” Jin Zixuan asks.

“Yes,” Wei Wuxian replies as he sits at one of the tables. Jin Guangyao takes a seat next to Jin Zixuan.

“I came here personally so I can invite the Jiangs to the Phoenix Mountain Hunt. It’s my mother’s orders.” Jin Zixuan pauses, looking over at A-jie. “She really hopes Lady Jiang can come along to watch the hunt.” Jiang Cheng and Wei Wuxian both look over at their sister, despite knowing what her response would be

“With Madame Jin’s invitation, I would like to accept it,” She replies.

“That’s great!” Jin Zixuan exclaims. Then he clears his throat. “What I mean is, my mother will be delighted to see you.” Jiang Cheng exchanges a look with Wei Wuxian and scoffs lightly. After they’d finished speaking, the three siblings escort the two Jin brothers to the entrance and bid them farewell.

“What did Jin Guangyao talk to you about that had to be spoken privately?” Jiang Cheng shoots out the question as soon as they are out of sight.

“The same thing Jin Zixuan told you, I assume,” Wei Wuxian replies. “Did he tell you that Nie-xiong went to Qiongqi Path?”

“Yes, wait no... wait *what* ?” Jiang Cheng sputters.

“Nie-xiong is always one step ahead of us. I can’t really stay mad at him.”

“Why were you mad at him in the first place?” Jiang Cheng scoffs. “Aren’t you glad you were given this opportunity? That *we* were given this chance?”

“I was mad because he was messing with something he clearly didn’t know how to deal with,” Wei Wuxian retorts. “We were lucky it didn’t go wrong.”

“Like what?”

“Well...if he didn’t know how to use the array, it could have wiped us out of existence...or altered our timeline.” Wei Wuxian shakes his head.

“Tell me everything he told you,” Jiang Cheng says insistently. Wei Wuxian gives him an exasperated look but obliges.

“So how do we know Jin Guangyao isn’t planning an early murder for Jin Guangshan now that he’s found out that his father is a scumbag earlier?” Jiang Cheng asks once Wei Wuxian

finishse.

“He can do whatever he wants.” Wei Wuxian shrugs. “As long as it doesn’t hurt our family and those we care about.”

“I thought you wanted Jin Guangshan to be brought to justice the “right way.” Jiang Cheng crosses his arms over his chest.

“I did think that but honestly,” Wei Wuxian lets out a bitter laugh. “Maybe Jin Guangshan doesn’t deserve that privilege. But if I’m trying to fix Jin Guangyao’s reputation, we can’t have a random murder at Carp Tower.”

“They won’t necessarily blame *him* . It’s not like Jin Guangshan doesn’t have other enemies.”

“That is true,” Wei Wuxian agrees. “Once we expose his crimes, there will be more people who hate him. Even Madam Jin has never liked him.”

“How can *anyone* like him? Anyways, you ran off earlier and didn’t finish your meal. Come eat something. A-jie made soup without the ribs. Then we can talk.” Jiang Cheng grabs Wei Wuxian by the wrist before he can protest. He sits his brother down and watches as he eats.

“Jiang Cheng, how am I going to eat if you’re staring at me?” Wei Wuxian complains

“If I don’t stare at you, are you going to eat every bite?” Jiang Cheng counters back. Wei Wuxian huffs loudly but doesn’t say any more. Instead, he lifts the bowl up and shovels the rest of the content into his mouth.

“There, happy?”

“No.”

“...”

“Wen Qing said the nightmares were psychological. Coming out from a place like the Burial Mounds after so long has a long-term effect.”

“Well.” Wei Wuxian grimaces, his eyes growing dark. “What did you expect, Jiang Cheng?” He asks tightly.

“I...I just didn’t expect the nightmares to happen at all,” Jiang Cheng admits. “After all..you’ve technically already gone through it once and it’s been over a decade for you.” Immediately after he says this, he wishes he didn’t. He had heard about how terrifying the Burial Mounds were but wasn’t there to experience the same things Wei Wuxian did. There could be some things that he could never forget.

“I didn’t expect it either,” Wei Wuxian says quietly. “Perhaps being back in my old body caused it.” Jiang Cheng barely keeps himself from wincing. He hated being reminded about Wei Wuxian’s lack of core

“You...,” Jiang Cheng hesitates. “You’re really not going to talk about it?” A part of him wants to shake Wei Wuxian by the shoulders until he confesses everything. His brother kept finding excuses not to *talk* to him and Jiang Cheng feels as if they’re slipping back into old habits. Bad ones.

“The Burial Mounds is an unpleasant place,” Wei Wuxian replies plainly. “Therefore, I went through unpleasant experiences, some I would rather not remember or recall. That’s all there is to it.” Jiang Cheng didn’t need to push him for details; he could only imagine the horrors that had occurred.

“And it’s either the nightmares or the pain.”

“The...” Jiang Cheng doesn’t finish the sentence. He knows exactly what his brother is referring to. Because he had gone through it himself. The lack of a golden core *hurts*. It was the kind of pain that gnawed you on the inside and kept you awake at night.

“How did you..endure it?” Jiang Cheng swallows and he silently berates himself yet again for failing to

“Wen Qing. She has her needles..acupuncture techniques. It helps. She was the reason I survived the Burial Mounds for so long really. I’m glad she was there.”

This somehow brings back Jiang Cheng’s own unpleasant memories: the day he had fought Wei Wuxian, the duel that was staged but one that still ended up in drawn blood on both sides. Back then he hadn’t known. He had stabbed Wei Wuxian without knowing the extent of his condition. At the time, he’d thought this was the kind of wound Wei Wuxian would always heal from, knowing how strong Wei Wuxian’s core had been and that he had the best healer there with him to help him recover. What he didn’t know was that Wei Wuxian’s core had been inside of *him* . His broken arm had healed in one month, quicker than most cultivators. Wei Wuxian had told him that his wound healed in a week; now Jiang Cheng knows it was a lie. Something tightens inside his chest.

What if I’d killed him? What if he’d never made it back to the Burial Mounds? What would I have said to A-jie?

“Jiang Cheng?” He hadn’t realized his hands had been trembling.

“What?” Jiang Cheng blinks at him blankly.

“Why don’t I show you my new fishing lure talisman?” Wei Wuxian says, trying to divert the conversation.

“Just fish? Or does it lure other creatures as well?”

“Follow me and find out,” Wei Wuxian snickers. Jiang Cheng rolls his eyes but follows Wei Wuxian to the pier anyways.

“I had planned for deity binding nets to be placed in the water for fishing as well, but I also wanted to try with a fishing hook,” Wei Wuxian explains. Jiang Cheng watches as he takes

out a fishing rod and draws symbols on a blank talisman, which he sticks onto the side of the rod. He reels and throws the hook into the water and waits. Jiang Cheng starts tapping his feet impatiently out of habit.

“Jiang Cheng, your tapping is going to scare away the fish.” Wei Wuxian swats his hand at him to make him stop. Jiang Cheng swats him back but stops tapping his feet. After a while, Wei Wuxian feels a tug at the end of the rod and tightens his grip on it. However when he does this, whatever is at the end of the hook tugs *hard* and he’s dragged several inches closer to the end of the pier with a startled yelp.

“What the-,” Wei Wuxian adjust his stance and starts reeling, but

“Are you fishing it or is it fishing you?” Jiang Cheng snorts as Wei Wuxian is again pulled closer towards the edge of the dock.

“Uhh well,” Wei Wuxian scoffs. “It’s strong..whatever it is. I don’t think it’s a fish, AH-.” Wei Wuxian lets out a yelp of alarm as he’s almost pulled off the dock. Jiang Cheng reacts fast, shooting Zidian out to wrap around Wei Wuxian’s waist.

“Just let go of it!” Jiang Cheng hisses. “Before it drags you into the water.”

“But it could be something valuable!”

“What, do you *want* to be eaten or something?” Jiang Cheng snaps. He increases the strength in Zidian, enough to keep it tied around Wei Wuxian, but not enough to hurt.

“I don’t think I’ll taste good. I’m too skinny.”

“Is this really the time to joke?!”

“It’s really not a big deal! AH-!” Jiang Cheng throws himself back to avoid being pulled into the air. Unfortunately, Zidian also unfurls due to the strain and it snaps back onto his wrist. Without the extra support, Wei Wuxian disappears into the lake with a loud splash

“Seriously?” Jiang Cheng gets to his feet and narrows his eyes at the water, waiting for signs of movement. Sure enough, bubbles appear about a foot away in the water. Jiang Cheng braces himself as something bursts out from the waters. Squinting his eyes against the blast, he sees it’s an...eel monster! The large creature has already alerted nearby disciples and they hurry over by the lake.

“Sect leader, how come an eel monster is in *Yunmeng* of all places?” One of them calls out, baffled.

“Because your Da-shixiong is a genius but an idiot at the same time,” Jiang Cheng mutters loudly.

“I heard that!” Wei Wuxian yells from where he’s swinging from the eel monster’s whiskers.

“I should let you get eaten!” Jiang Cheng growls back even as he jumps up to attack the giant eel with Zidian. The other disciples follow his queue by aiming their bows at the creature,

being careful not to hit their head disciple.

“Maybe you should let go of it first! Or you really *will* get eaten!” Jiang Cheng shouts.

“If I let go, it can still eat me! Just give me a second!” Wei Wuxian twists in midair, pulling on the whiskers of the eel like the reins of a horse while sitting on its neck. Jiang Cheng lashes out with Zidian again, wrapping the spiritual weapon around the eel’s mouth. The arrow in its neck is already causing it to shriek in pain. It was trying to shake them off by twisting and turning its body. Somehow Wei Wuxian is still clinging on, despite the tail swinging around and slashing dangerously close to him.

“Seriously, let go of it!” Jiang Cheng is really getting concerned about just how much longer Wei Wuxian could hang on now. His arms weren’t as strong as before. Wei Wuxian slips something out from his sleeve and slams it into the eel monsters’ neck. It shrieks even louder now, but its struggle is weakening as the continuing onslaught of arrows continues. Wei Wuxian finally gets rid of it and falls into the water with a loud splash. Jiang Cheng waits by the shore and pulls him out of the water.

“Reckless idiot!” Jiang Cheng hisses, smacking him across the shoulders. “What the fuck was that display? I told you to stop showing off, didn’t I?”

“Ow...” Wei Wuxian whines. “That hurts! I’m already sore from hanging on for so long.”

“Serves you right!! I told you to let go, didn’t I?” Jiang Cheng snaps in reply as he checks Wei Wuxian over for injuries.

“Hey hey, riding an eel monster is more fun than clinging to the mouth of the Xuanwu tortoise okay. At least the eel monster can’t eat me. Its mouth is too small.”

“I think you misjudged the size of that mouth and yourself.”

Jiang Cheng turns back towards the lake. The eel monster hadn’t died, only swam away and down the river, leaving a small trail of blood from its wounds.

What exactly was the point of clinging onto it if we weren’t going to kill it?” Wei Wuxian snickers at him and Jiang Cheng aims another hand towards him; this time he ducks away.

“I told you, it was fun! You should try it sometimes!”

“Oh shut up already!”

“Da-shixiong! Da-shixiong!” A group of disciples hurries over, panting hard. “You were riding that eel monster! It was cool!”

“He didn’t slip off at all!”

“Did he fight the Xuanwu tortoise this way too?” Jiang Cheng rolls his eyes but Wei Wuxian gives a small smile.

“Not quite. The eel monster is skinnier and faster. I don’t know how I clung on as long as I did.”

“Da-shixiong!” The disciple’s panicked voice snaps Jiang Cheng’s attention back to Wei Wuxian and he barely catches the other man in time as he sways on his feet.

“I’m fine. Just tired.”

“Idiot,” Jiang Cheng hisses again. He takes Wei Wuxian’s arm and wraps it around his shoulders to support it. A disciple takes his other arm and they lead Wei Wuxian back to his room. Wen Qing checks him over despite his protests and tells both Jiang siblings that he’s only exhausted his energy levels. Afterward, she snaps at Wei Wuxian the same way Jiang Cheng did. Wei Wuxian only gives a sheepish smile from under the covers before they leave him to rest.

A few days later, they arrived in LanLing for the conference meeting. Wei Wuxian hesitantly walks right directly to the right of Jiang Cheng, but always at least a step behind him. As they enter Fragrance Halls, Jiang Cheng has a feeling the stares aren’t directed towards him. Wei Wuxian shifts by his side, but keeps his eyes forward and shoulders straight.

“Sect leader Jiang, Young Master Wei,” Jin Guangyao is the first to greet them followed by Jin Guangshan.

“Sect leader Jiang,” Jin Guangshan greets him. “It’s the first time I’ve seen Young Master Wei at important meetings like this.”

Jiang Cheng didn’t miss the way Wei Wuxian tenses, though he doesn’t know if it was because of Jin Guangshan’s presence or the statement he had just said. Jiang Cheng grits his teeth but calms himself down. He knows full well what people like the Jins thought about Wei Wuxian. Today, he hoped to change that.

“He’s my head disciple,” Jiang Cheng says calmly, leveling his eyes to Jin Guangshan’s. “Of course he should attend.” Jin Guangshan is silent for a moment before smiling and nodding.

“Of course.”

“Come sit.” Jin Guangyao gestures to the tables on the right. Jiang Cheng sits down behind one and Wei Wuxian sits directly next to him, rather than two tables behind the front table as he used to do when Jiang Fengmian was still the sect leader. The Nie sect arrives next and Jin Guangyao hurries to greet his sworn brother.

“San-ge!” Huaisang waves to the man. Jiang Cheng studies the Nie boy’s face. He’s smiling at Jin Guangyao, his face calm. There was absolutely no sign of anger or hostility on his face.

Was this the mask he had put on when he planned Jin Guangyao’s death over the years? Jiang Cheng thinks. He still finds it hard that “Head Shaker” had been the one to ultimately beat Jin Guangyao at his own game. It almost makes Jiang Cheng want to be wary of the man. When the Lan sect arrives, Wei Wuxian’s eyes are basically glued to the Second Twin

Jade. When the meeting finally starts, Jiang Cheng has to nudge Wei Wuxian lightly with his elbow to make him turn his attention back to the front.

“In today’s meeting, we will be discussing what is to be done with any remaining Wen dregs and how to divide up the territory in Qishan to be distributed among the sects,” Jin Guangshan says loudly.

“Sect leader Jin!” Nie Mingjue immediately interjects. “This is an important topic indeed. Why don’t you start by explaining why your nephew imprisoned hundreds of civilians including the elderly, children and innocent civilians at Qionqi Path?!” Immediately yells of outrage come from the sects, major and minor alike. Madam Jin turns her icy glare towards Jin Guangshan who *visibly* flinches from it. Jiang Cheng smirks in amusement and exchanges a look with Wei Wuxian. This was going to be a fun meeting.

Chapter End Notes

Seriously, 95% of this chapter was crack or something. I hope you enjoyed the mood change :D

- So I just wanted to add some humor into this chapter. The unagi thing is inspired from Avatar the last airbender. Except it’s not as big that it can eat WWX. It’s like the Measuring Snake but like an eel/water version.
- if anyone is wondering how JC knows it was NHS who planned JGY's death, he finds out before the whole time travel thing

Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Wei Wuxian tries his best not to zone out. He'd promised to be there for Jiang Cheng, but meetings like this were always boring and exhausting to him. It was the reason why he would never be fit to be a sect leader. He straightens up and listens to the loud clamour of voices coming from various cultivators.

"I do not think the Wens should be under the authority of the Jins anymore," Lan Xichen voices out firmly.

"The Jins are the strongest right now. Who else can control these Wen dogs?" Jin Zixun argues. Of course. *Of course* it was Jin Zixun.

"They were women and children! My brother saw them with his own eyes!"

"Are we only going to believe we did this on Young Master Nie's words? Shouldn't we hear the testimony from a Jin sect member?" A minor sect leader calls out.

"I saw it too," Nie Mingjue says loudly. "Are you saying my brother and I are lying?" Nie Mingjue growls dangerously. The minor sect leader gulps and doesn't speak again.

"If we ask a Jin, they'll surely lie and deny they were involved to avoid getting indicted!" Luo Qingyang's voice rings out loud and clear above the other cultivators. Wei Wuxian scoffs. His hand reaches into his robes. He's glad that he's brought the Truth Talismans; that way he had a backup plan in case the Jins wanted to lie yet again.

"We can lead a group of disciples to see for ourselves," Lan Xichen suggests.

"I have soldiers stationed nearby," Nie Mingjue says. "They haven't done anything of course, but they'd report back to me if anyone tried anything."

"I did see Jin Zixun there," Nie Huaisang's voice makes Wei Wuxian turn his head in the direction of where the Nies sit. Huaisang looks nervous but he tries to keep his head held high.

"A-Yao has told me himself that Jin Zixun is the one overseeing the camps. I believe him." Wei Wuxian sees Jin Guangyao ducking his head as Jin Zixun throws him a furious betrayed glare.

"The civilians were supposed to be spared. It was something that all the sects agreed upon, Young Master Jin," Lan Qiren says icily. "Abusing the elderly, non-cultivators, and *children*. That is something cultivators should never stoop to do. We are meant to maintain righteousness and justice." Wei Wuxian quietly scoffs at these words. These were the same

words the sects had claimed in the previous timeline. Would they just end up being empty ones again? Would the sects still cling onto their hypocritical ways?

“They are all Wens, therefore no one is innocent!” Jin Zixun argues. “They’re all evil.” This was definitely *not* the wrong thing to say because even Jin Guangshan is hissing at his nephew to shut up as the sects let out yells of outrage again.

“Sect leader Jin, is this how you teach your disciples to act? He shows absolutely no remorse for what he did!” Out of all the sect leaders to say this, it was Sect leader *Yao* . Wei Wuxian hides his laugh by chugging a cup of wine.

“The children have done nothing wrong! Even if their parents fought against us!” A woman, one of the minor sect leader’s wife protests. “They should not be forced to do labor. That is cruel and inhumane!” Murmurs of agreement fill the hall.

“We already have a branch of the Wens in their custody,” Jiang Cheng finally speaks up. “As you all should know by now, Wen Qing and her family are from a branch in the Wen sect. They are mainly healers and farmers. And everyone should know how Wen Qing contributed to our side of the Sunshot Campaign. She helped to heal many of our soldiers and saved countless lives.”

“Wen Qing?”

“She’s that famed doctor.”

“Wasn’t she a high-ranking disciple under Wen Ruohan?”

“She risked her life to betray him!”

“Can they *really* be trusted?”

“Yes yes, I know that already.” Jin Guangshan waves his hand dismissively at Jiang Cheng and Wei Wuxian feels offended on his behalf. “If you wish to shelter them, so be it.”

“The Wens killed all kinds of people without mercy,” Jin Zixun spits. “Why should *we* show them mercy?”

“Do you prefer that we sink to their level?” Nie Mingjue snaps back, his voice booming across the room, causing Jin Zixun and several cultivators to shrink back in their seats. “We were supposed to end Wen Ruohan’s evil reign and actions, not replace them with another sect who are willing to turn a blind eye while their disciples did the same.” He glares over at Jin Guangshan as he speaks.

“The Qishan Wen sect is gone now...does the Jin sect wish to replace it?”

It was like the words Wei Wuxian had said back then, almost like an echo. Oh, how the tables have turned.

“I agree with Chifeng-zun,” Lan Xichen says. “Our Gusu laws say we must uphold justice. There is no justice in slaughtering innocents.”

“Then what do you suggest we do with them, Zewu-jun?” Jin Zixuan asks, his tone polite. He, Wei Wuxian notices, has been strangely quiet throughout most of the conference, only choosing to speak now.

“Perhaps the Nie and Lan can also take in some innocent civilians?” Lan Xichen suggests. “We can give them land to farm and houses to live in on the edge of our territory. They will still live within camps but under different conditions.”

“What if they rebel?” A minor sect disciple protests.

“They won’t if they are treated fairly,” Nie Mingjue retorts. As he speaks, he glares up at Jin Guangshan. “And we will still be keeping an eye on them.”

“Unfair and cruel treatment will make people rebel. If we show them kindness, they will be grateful,” Lan Xichen adds.

“Either way, the Jin sect has lost their right to manage the prisoners,” Nie Mingjue adds, a low growl in his voice.

“I agree!” A minor sect leader says loudly.

“And me!”

Wei Wuxian can’t help but smirk with glee at the flustered look on both Jin Guangshan’s and Jin Zixun’s face.

“Fine, take them if you want them so badly!” The sect leader snaps, his face red as a tomato. “See if we care! They’re your problem now. But,” Wei Wuxian doesn’t flinch as Jin Guangshan’s eyes snap over to him.

“You say I’m the one to overexert my powers? Why are you not questioning the Jiang sect as well for holding such a powerful weapon on hand?”

Jiang Cheng tenses from next to him, his eyes narrowed. The attention of the room has shifted to his sect now and Jin Guangshan is smirking in relish at it. Wei Wuxian remains calm, even as hushed whispers fill the room.

“Rest assured,” Wei Wuxian says, twirling Chenqing lazily in one hand. “Once the Jiang sect is stabilized, it will be destroyed. Neither my sect nor I want to make our sect a target for possessing the amulet.”

“Destroy it? Can you destroy such a powerful weapon?”

“I don’t have a choice,” Wei Wuxian replies, bravely making eye contact with Jin Guangshan. “We won’t need another Wen Ruohan in our lives, right?”

“Then why must you keep it on hand? Why not destroy it right away?”

“Like I said, the Jiang sect needs to be stabilized. I have a plan on how to use the energy from the amulet.” Jiang Cheng shoots him a look, but Wei Wuxian keeps his focus on the front of

the room.

“Sect leader Jin,” Nie Mingjue says loudly. “Are you trying to purposely diverge the conversation? Why don’t we speak about your crimes first?”

“I already said you can take them! See if I care. You’re dooming yourselves and your sect by going against me.” His lips curl in a sneer. “Your sect needs my help more than ever for resources and support. Are you sure you want to do this?”

“We won’t ally ourselves with someone like you!” A cultivator calls out.

“Wei Wuxian’s new inventions have been plenty helpful.” Another one calls out. Wei Wuxian flushes. He hadn’t been aware that his inventions had spread outside of Yunmeng.

“I am also in charge of this sect, Guangshan.” Madame Jin’s sharp voice rings out. “I have the power to override your jurisdiction right now. How dare you keep the fact about the labor camps to yourself and close supporters only without even informing the sect lady or your own *heir*?! Don’t you have anything to say for yourself?! You are clearly overestimating your power.” Jin Guangshan gulps and falls silent again. Wei Wuxian sees MianMian smiling in satisfaction, exchanging a nod with her friend next to her. Perhaps there *were* more disciples than MianMian and Jin Zixuan who were righteous within the Jin sect.

“For the prisoners, I will send soldiers to escort them from Qiongqi Path then. Thank you for your generosity, Sect leader Jin.” Lan Xichen stands and bows to him. Wei Wuxian doesn’t know how sincere he is, but there’s a hardness in the eyes of the usual gentle sect leader that tells him he is not happy. When the meeting disperses, Wei Wuxian approaches Huaisang who’s quick to hide his face behind his fan. Looking at the fan, Wei Wuxian notices it’s not his usual favorite fan that he always carried around; it was a much firmer looking fan, seemingly made of metal.

“Nie-xiong, tell me. How exactly did you end up at Qiongqi Path?”

“Oh me?” Nie Huaisang closes the fan and smirks. “I have my ways. I was simply wandering around LanLing while Da-ge was visiting Jin Guangyao.”

“The guards let you pass?” Wei Wuxian frowns.

“Well not exactly...when I came into the valley, I saw the elderly women and men carrying heavy boulders. I saw one of them fall and a guard was going to whip them. I interfered. They refused to listen to me so I went back to my brother. You should have seen his face when he arrived. The guards didn’t even *argue* ; they didn’t dare to. We couldn’t rescue anyone without informing Sect leader Jin unfortunately; it’d have been seen as an act of rebellion. He stationed soldiers nearby instead to keep guard, but neither side has drawn swords. If it weren’t for the fact that the Jin and Nie have a brotherhood alliance, then I’m sure he would have saved the Wens right then and there.”

“You’re surprisingly brave,” Wei Wuxian mutters. “I wonder why you didn’t fight alongside us against the Wens.”

“I do not think I am *that* brave,” Huaisang says in a small voice.

“You stood between a whip and another person. You *are* brave. Brave enough to act with righteousness.”

“Sure,” Huaisang mutters, still looking uncertain, then his face brightens.

“Hey Wei-xiong, what do you think about the three of us becoming sworn brothers?” Wei Wuxian blinked in surprise. He had never considered that kind of relationship in his entire life. He only knew of the Venerated Triad and the Venerated *Quartet* *.

(*A/N: The Venerated Quartet are the juniors)

I think that’d be great!” He finally replies. “It will tie the sects together even more.”

“Not only that Wei-xiong, the Jiang sect needs more support, does it not? I will make sure that the Nie sect will help in any way they can. It is better than being too reliant on Jin Guangshan, especially when his downfall is closer than we planned.” Wei Wuxian smirks.

“I’ll ask Jiang Cheng about it.”

Wei Wuxian pats Huaisang on the shoulders then goes to find Jiang Cheng outside.

“All the other sect leaders have demanded to go to Qiongqi Path themselves. To escort the prisoners out,” Jiang Cheng says as he approaches.

“We should hurry then.”

“Wei Ying.” Wei Wuxian turns.

“Come fly with me.” Before Wei Wuxian can reply, Lan Wangji wraps a hand around his waist and tugs him onto Bichen

“A-Ah, Lan Zhan!” Wei Wuxian’s face turns hot. He doesn’t miss Jiang Cheng’s outraged look and the stares coming from everyone else at their display. Wei Wuxian shifts so he balances on the sword and then they take off.

Before the conference, he had been doing all the breathing and qi exercises Wen Qing had told him to do and although he hadn’t told Jiang Cheng, Shijie or even Lan Zhan *yet*, he was positive he could feel a faint core in his dantian. It was almost as faint as the one Mo Xuanyu had before Lan Zhan had started to help him to cultivate it through dual cultivation. Lan Zhan had still offered to help him this time, but Wen Qing tells him that Jiang Cheng’s spiritual energy would benefit him the most, considering that the energy is from his original core. When he had accidentally sprained his arms the other day from clinging onto the unagi, his core, although small, had helped it heal within a matter of days. However his core wasn’t even close to being strong enough to allow him to fly a sword alone. For this, he’s grateful for Lan Zhan’s support.

“L-Lan Zhan?”

“Mn.”

“I missed you, Lan-er gege.” Wei Wuxian leans into Lan Wangji’s shoulders with a sigh.

“Missed you too, Wei Ying.”

“Oh for fuck’s sake.” Jiang Cheng’s loud voice from behind them startles him.

“Jiang Cheng? Why are you following us??”

“Why am I-, we’re going the same way, dumbass! Also I should make sure Lan Wangji doesn’t try to kidnap my head disciple to Cloud Recesses.”

“Not kidnapping,” Lan Wangji counters.

“You have to get married again in this timeline! And as sect leader, you’ll have to ask for my permission to marry Wei Wuxian. He’s my brother and head disciple. For now he is still a part of the Jiang sect!” Lan Wangji turns around to give him an icy glare

“Okay, will you guys cut it out?” Wei Wuxian sighs. “I’m sure Jiang Cheng will be a good wedding planner!”

“How would you know that? I didn’t plan A-jie’s wedding. It was all the Jins.”

“I have faith in you, didi.”

“Who’s your didi?!” comes Jiang Cheng’s roar of response. “ You’re older than me by *five days* !”

“We’re here,” Lan Wangji says calmly, interrupting their conversation. Wei Wuxian inhales sharply. The unpleasant memories of both his visits to Qiongqi Path begin to awaken. There was no rain this time to hide the heavy scent of blood in the air. As the other sect leaders land, they seem to notice as well. The guards scramble to one side without resisting as Nie Mingjue storms through the entrance of the camp. Only Jin Zixuan had come along, wanting to see for himself if his Father really did commit such atrocities.

“What is this?” Jiang Cheng sounds angry, shocked and confused. Wei Wuxian swallows. Jiang Cheng had never seen the horrors for himself last time, he had only heard about it from his brother; now it was like a slap in the face. Jin Zixuan’s face is pale with horror and shock, staring around with his feet frozen in place.

“The bodies...Lan Zhan...” Wei Wuxian is shaking with both rage and anguish. Lan Wangji places an arm on his wrist to comfort him but on the other hand, his grip on Bichen tightens.

“The Jins have gone too far!” Nie Mingjue says angrily. Baxia is practically shaking in his hand, eager for blood.

“What the fuck...!” Jiang Cheng mutters through gritted teeth. Wei Wuxian can see Zidian glowing on his wrist, giving off tiny sparks. There were piles of body, large and small. When Lan Xichen leans down to observe one, he recoils back when he sees the body of a child. Wei Wuxian reaches through Chenqing, breathing through clenched teeth as he feels the resentful energy roaring inside his meridians.

“Wei Ying,” Lan Wangji says warningly, putting a hand on his wrist gently.

“Lan Zhan...they really are the worst! How can people like this be worthy of being cultivators!” Wei Wuxian spits in rage.

“They’ll be brought to justice according to the law,” Nie Mingjue says grimly. “If Jin Guangshan refuses, it will only drag him and his sect down when the other sects rise up against him.”

“I do not think he should have a say in how much he gets punished,” Wei Wuxian snorts. “Won’t he just try and make it easier for himself? The elders are probably just as conniving and corrupt as he is if they did nothing to stop this.” He catches Jiang Cheng giving him a warning look, as if telling him to be careful of what he said, but then he says.

“He was even after the position of Chief Cultivator. There is no way he will ever get what he wants now. Even Madam Jin is planning something to limit his powers.

“I think Zewu-jun is far more suitable for such a position,” Wei Wuxian says. The older Twin Jade turns to look at him in surprise.

“You honor me with your praise, Young Master Wei, but I do not know about that.”

“I agree with Wei Wuxian,” Nie Mingjue interjects. “But we shouldn’t discuss it here. Let’s go back to LanLing. My men will bring these people to Qinghe.”

Wei Wuxian helps to gather the Wen remnants and finds a group of young children cowering in one of the huts.

“Hey,” He says in a soft voice. “You’re going to be okay. We’re here to rescue you.” He crouches until his eye is level with the children, making himself as non-threatening as possible even as his rage threatens to build up against the cruelty he was witnessing.

“Wei Wuxian, whe-.” Jiang Cheng’s voice startles him and the children who immediately shrink back into the corner. Immediately, Jiang Cheng crouches down next to him, though the angry scowl he has on his face doesn’t do much to reassure the children.

It takes another incense of time, but they finally coax everyone out. Nie Mingjue and Lan Xichen had found other groups of children. Most of the children were around twelve or thirteen, others were almost as young as A-Yuan. There was even another toddler, being held in the arms of a frail-looking woman. Jin Zixuan stays further away from the group, uncertain of how his presence would do to the prisoners.

“I wish we came sooner.” Wei Wuxian clenches his fist in frustration.

“Huaisang beat us to it,” Jiang Cheng points out. “What are we going to do with these children?” He’s addressing the Nie and Lan sect leaders now.

“It’s best we put them in orphanages if their parents are dead,” Zewu-jun suggests. His eyes softened. “Or even bring them into our sect.”

“Would Sect leader Jin allow that?” Jiang Cheng asks.

“These people are no longer under his jurisdiction. He doesn’t need to allow anything,” Nie Mingjue replies.

“I will allow it then.” Jin Zixuan steps in. The prisoners immediately shrink back in fear at the sight of the Jin heir until Wei Wuxian turns towards them with words of reassurance.

“Sect leader.” A Nie disciple hurries over. “We found some cultivators here as well though they..they claimed they did not fight in the war.”

“Do we have any way to prove that?” Nie Mingjue narrows his eyes.

“I do!” Wei Wuxian steps forward. “I have something that will help.” He pulls out the Truth talismans from his robes. During the last few days, he had already tested it out on himself, his family and a few disciples. When he had been satisfied, he had tested them out on the cultivators that Wen Ning had found.

“They’ve been tested out to work,” Jiang Cheng adds in helpfully. “You can try them out yourselves if you wish to.”

“No need,” Zewu-jun says serenely. “I trust Young Master Wei’s invention skills.” He takes the talismans from Wei Wuxian’s hands.

“Sect leader Jiang, are you bringing some of the children home?” Jiang Cheng glances over to the children clinging to his and Wei Wuxian’s ankles.

“It’s up to them where they want to go,” Jiang Cheng says at last. “Anywhere but LanLing. Yunmeng already has an orphanage set up....war took a lot from us.”

The children blink at them blankly, their eyes still rounded in uncertainty and fear. A few of them have found their parents and have been reunited but at least six children remain where they stand.

“I’ll go wherever my jiejie goes,” A small girl says as she clings on to the sleeve of an older girl.

“We’ll go wherever it is safe,” The older sister adds.

“You will be safe with us in Unclean Realm,” Nie Mingjue says, lowering himself close to the ground upon seeing the children shrink back from his massive physique.

“Or Lotus Pier,” Wei Wuxian says cheerfully. “You can pick lotus seeds and I can teach you to swim!”

“You’re making this sound like a competition,” Jiang Cheng snorts. “Just let them go with whoever they want to go with.”

“With Xian-gege then!” The little girl pipes up.

“I want a weapon like that.” A young boy bravely walks up to Nie Mingjue and points at Baxia.

“Then you can come to Unclean Realm,” Nie Mingjue tells him with a low rumble in his voice. “Your parents...” He asks hesitantly. The boy looks away with tear-filled eyes and that is all it took for everyone to understand.

“Wei Wuxian, do you know if these people are from Dafan Wen as well?” Wei Wuxian starts at being addressed but recovers quickly.

“They are not...Wen Qing’s family are all at Lotus Pier. These may be Qishan Wen people.”

“I see.” Nie Mingjue nods. “It is of little importance to me that they are not healers and farmers like Wen Qing’s ward....what matters is that the Jins were torturing innocent lives and violated the agreement by doing something like this behind our backs.”

“He has to be brought to justice.”

“And that he will,” Nie Mingjue says, his voice like steel. “I will personally make sure it happens, regardless of how it will affect the relationship between my sect and his.” His voice hardens to a low growl.

“A-Yao can’t do much to stand up against his Father alone. Do not blame him too much,” Lan Xichen says, trying to soothe him. “He couldn’t take such a big risk especially when he’s only just gained a position within the sect.”

“I wouldn’t say he gained *too* much,” Nie Mingjue huffs. “Considering...Jin Guangshan gave him the generation name of ‘guang’ when it should be ‘zi’.

I did question that too. Wei Wuxian thinks. Jin Guangshan was clearly telling Jin Guangyao where his place was by giving him that name. Everyone knows that Jin Guangshan would never put him at the same level as his legitimate son and heir.

“Wei Ying...when will you come to Gusu?”

“Whenever Jiang Cheng allows it,” Wei Wuxian replies. Lan Wangji glances over at Jiang Cheng who’s in a deep conversation with Nie Mingjue and Lan Xichen.

“You’re right. I should ask Sect leader Jiang first.” There’s still an iciness to his tone, a tension, but his expression is calm.

“He has already spoken to me about it,” Lan Xichen’s voice cuts in. “We look forward to seeing you in Cloud Recesses at the end of this month.”

“So soon?” Wei Wuxian glances at Jiang Cheng who gives him a level stare back.

“Yes. Isn’t it better for you to recover quickly so you can be ready to help me again?” Jiang Cheng says evenly.

“Ah-ah? Oh right,” Wei Wuxian stammers. “I suppose we also need to ask Wen Qing.”

“Right,” Jiang Cheng agrees. “For now, we need to sweep the area and make sure there aren’t any more labor camps.”

“I’ve already sent disciples to do that,” Nie Mingjue says. “It is difficult to do it with the Jin officials refusing to give us intel, but if we’re spread out enough, then we can accomplish it.”

“Then I’ll send disciples too,” Lan Xichen says. “I’ll have Wangji be in charge.”

“Yes, Xiongzhang.” Lan Wangji dips his head obediently.

“Do you need me to look as well, Jiang Cheng?” Wei Wuxian looks over at his brother, waiting for an answer.

“No,” Jiang Cheng says firmly. “I’ll send someone else. They can cover more ground by flying.” Wei Wuxian purses his lips but doesn’t argue. Instead he turns back to Lan Wangji

“Lan Zhan, the Wens...”

“Will be treated fairly this time. I promise.”

“They won’t be let off entirely,” Wei Wuxian mutters. But he had expected that.

“There is one more question I must ask you, Young Master Wei and I’m sure everyone shares my concern. Sect leader Jin did mention it earlier.” Wei Wuxian straightens up, already knowing what was about to be asked.

“You’re asking about my amulet, right?”

“Yes...the power destroyed the yin iron, didn’t it?”

“I was going to destroy the seal along with the yin iron pieces...but I decided not to. Because I wanted to use it to track the last piece. I didn’t say this in front of Jin Guangshan because I suspected he has other motives for asking about my amulet.” Nie Mingjue blinks in surprise. Of course he’d be surprised. Everyone had assumed that the seal had been made from the fourth piece.

“There was a fifth piece, in the Xuanwu cave.” He sees Lan Wangji and Jiang Cheng casting sharp looks at him out of the corner of his eye but neither of them interfere. “It was in the form of a sword. When trying to survive the Burial Mounds, I created the seal in order to find a way to escape it. It took me three months to succeed.”

“The Burial Mounds?” Nie Mingjue says sharply. Lan Xichen’s face changes from shock to distress.

“Wen Chao.” Jiang Cheng answers for him. “When he went missing. That was where he was. After losing his core.” Wei Wuxian is about to hiss in alarm when Nie Mingjue cuts in again/

“Wen Zhuliu.” Wei Wuxian lets out the breath he had been holding and finds himself nodding along with Jiang Cheng.

“He didn’t destroy all of it,” He says hastily. “Wen Qing says she can help me fix it over time.”

“She is a skilled healer,” Nie Mingjue grunts. “She can do it. She spent years working as Wen Ruohan’s personal physician while he worked with the Yin Iron and resentful energy energy, did he not?”

“Yes,” Wei Wuxian answers cautiously.

“If she can get you back on the proper path of cultivation, then it will only be a good thing.”

“Of course.” Wei Wuxian nods. “The amulet is no longer needed now that the war is over. It’s best that it should be destroyed as soon as possible. If the amulet is made from the yin sword, it should work the same way to help us track down the other yin iron pieces, much like how Lan Zhan and I did.”

The search for the other camps took almost the rest of the day. By the time everyone had been relocated to Qinghe, excluding the few people who wanted to go with the Jiang sect, it was nearly nightfall. Still, this did not stop Nie Mingjue from giving Jin Guangshan a piece of his mind again. Later that night in their rooms, Wei Wuxian voices out another concern.

“This won’t affect Shijie’s engagement right? And Jin Ling?” It had been something the both of them had worried about for defying Jin Guangshan.

“Madame Jin was the one to set the engagement up. She can do it again,” Jiang Cheng answers easily.

“Oh right...and the peacock will confess. In front of everyone. Declare his love for her loudly.” Wei Wuxian snickers at the memory.

“He did what now?”

“Oh you should have seen it. You had just been a few minutes late!” Wei Wuxian crows.

“And you never told me about it??” Wei Wuxian shifts away from Jiang Cheng’s hand.

“Maybe you’ll get to see it this time.”

“Hmph. Go back to your own room. Aren’t you sharing one with your Hanguang-jun?”

“Jiang Cheng! Don’t say that out loud!” Wei Wuxian’s face heats up.

“Why not? Everyone at Lotus Pier knows you-,”

“Okay okay! I’m going!” Wei Wuxian yelps, running towards the door. In the end, he does find Lan Zhan waiting for him in front of his room and they go inside together, turning off all candles before slipping into bed together.

I was gonna post this yesterday after checking it over. But I worked a 5 hour cashier shift and was too exhausted to properly edit it and I probably would have missed a ton of mistakes. Here is an extra long chapter for y'all :D

On another note, I do have a job now (YAY FOR BEING EMPLOYED!!) and I work five hours shifts. I don't really have a set schedule but just know that workdays may slow down my process with updates

Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

I'm tempted to add in some NHS and LWJ perspective fics too though idk if it's too late for that when we're this far into the story. Let me know in the comments or something

Also I know the tags said 'lots of wangxian' moments but apparently I'm too into writing yunmeng bro soft vibes rather than romantic scenes. I promise I'll write more Wangxian into the next chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Upon their return back to Lotus Pier, Wei Wuxian helps to settle the children they'd rescued. Shijie is quick to make them feel at home and tells the younger shidis to do the same. They'd been wary at first, but trusted their sect leader's decision. Any cultivators that had chosen to go with due to their loyalty to Wen Qing and Wen Ning are put under close watch with their swords and any other weapons confiscated. Afterwards, Wei Wuxian leaves his flute in his room and retreats to one of the meditating pavilions. He stays in the pavilion for another shichen before returning back to his room. His next talisman invention idea was invisibility talismans. He also needed to test out the shape-shifting spell, though he had been reluctant too until he was sure there were no flaws. It would be extremely unfortunate if he found himself stuck in the form of a crow. Jiang Cheng would probably threaten to cook him just to vent his anger and annoyance!

He laughs to himself before activating the invisibility talisman. He has no way of knowing whether it worked or not other than leaning over a bucket of water that he uses to wash his face every morning. He sees no reflection. Wei Wuxian smirks and leaves his room, creeping around the hall and going straight towards the spice storage. Wen Qing had confiscated the supply that he kept in his room, despite him trying his best to hide it under the floorboards. He sneaks inside. He makes sure to grab spices with extra jars to avoid suspicion and when he makes it back into his room, he hides them, this time in a secret compartment that he had built under the wood beneath his pillow. After deactivating the invisibility talisman, he returns to the kitchen, ready to cook up a meal.

"Young Master Wei, you are cooking?" A soft voice asks from the entranceway of the kitchen.

"I can cook," Wei Wuxian says earnestly. "Your sister has forbidden me from eating spicy food, but how'd you like to try one of my home cooked meals?"

"I'd love to," Wen Ning replies just as Jiang Cheng enters the kitchen exclaiming

"Absolutely not!"

“Jiang Cheng! Don’t ruin the fun,” Wei Wuxian whines as he takes out the ingredients. “What’s wrong with cooking for someone? Cooking is an important skill!”

“That’s rich coming from you,” Jiang Cheng retorts. “Your food is absolutely unbearable.”

“Or you have weak taste buds,” Wei Wuxian fires back. He continues putting ingredients into the wok.

“I grew up eating Yunmeng dishes. I know the proper amount of spice that should be in food. *This* .” Jiang Cheng gestures to the jars of spices Wei Wuxian has set out. “Is not. This is just toxic.”

“Um, I’ll come back later,” Wen Ning says, smiling awkwardly before scrambling out of the room.

“My cooking is absolutely fine. Just ask Shijie.”

“You should ask her to be honest with you then.” Jiang Cheng rolls his eyes. “The last time the disciples had your cooking, they were all bedridden from stomach aches. You should be forbidden from cooking.”

“Meanie,” Wei Wuxian huffs and crosses his arms over his chest. “There’s no such rule.”

“Maybe there is now.”

“*Jiang Cheng* , you wouldn’t!” Wei Wuxian stares at him in mock offense. Jiang Cheng smirks at him.

“I can if I want to.” Jiang Cheng crosses his arms. “I’m the sect leader now. There aren’t as many rules here as there are at Cloud Recesses but this rule might just be necessary for the safety of the disciples. Or all residents at Lotus Pier, really.”

“Fine, fine! I’ll add less spice this time, okay?”

“That still doesn’t sound reassuring.”

“Jiang Cheng!”

“Boys, are we really arguing about cooking?” The two of them quickly quiet down when their sister enters the kitchen. “I thought my soup would also be a way to quell the fighting between you two.”

“It works too,” Wei Wuxian says cheerfully. Usually, Wei Wuxian would try and take

“A-Xian, just let me cook. I always do the cooking for you boys.”

“That’s just it, Shijie. I should cook for you sometimes!”

“Or just let *me* do it,” Jiang Cheng adds. “I can cook something for you as well, A-jie. Something that isn’t toxic.” Wei Wuxian wacks the spatula against Jiang Cheng’s shoulders

and he gets elbowed in response.

“A-Xian, I can teach you to cook again if you want to.”

“Ha!” Jiang Cheng exclaims. “She literally said you needed to learn, my point has been proven!”

“Boys,” A-jie hides again before Wei Wuxian can open his mouth again. “Eat first. Argue later.” They sit down and fall silent as they eat their afternoon meal in peace.

“By the way, Jiang Cheng. Nie-xiong says he wants to enter a sworn brother alliance with us. What do you think?”

“Does he now?” Jiang Cheng raises his eyebrows before swallowing his mouthful of food. “I don’t see why not. We do need an alliance bond...I half expected Jin Guangyao to ask you to join the Venerated Triad after the Sunshot Campaign, but I guess it didn’t happen.” Now it’s Wei Wuxian’s turn to be surprised.

“You expected *what* now?”

“Never mind, it was a weird thought..I forgot about it until you brought up being sworn brothers with Huaisang. Has he asked his brother about it yet?”

“I’m sure he’ll agree...he knows we’ve all been friends since we were young. And Huaisang doesn’t have many friends according to his Da-ge.”

“I’ll wait for his letter then.”

“We can include Shijie too,” Wei Wuxian adds. “I’m sure Nie-xiong won’t mind. What do you say, Shijie?” He turns to her.

“I’d love to,” She declares, her eyes lighting up with delight. “That means you’ll have to call me ‘A-jie’, right?”

“Does that mean Jiang Cheng needs to call me ‘da-ge’?” Wei Wuxian snickers when he sees Jiang Cheng’s face redden.

“Oi, you!”

“It would be appropriate,” Shijie points out mildly, hiding a smile of amusement behind her sleeve.

“A-jie,” Jiang Cheng protests. Wei Wuxian sticks his tongue out at him in triumph. Jiang Cheng opens his mouth to snap back something when someone basically tumbles into the dining pavilion.

“A-Yuan!” Wei Wuxian stands up to greet the child halfway and pick him up. “How have you been, my little radish?”

“Why is A-Yuan a radish?” The toddler whines. “I want to be a lotus.”

“Hmm, there are a lot of lotuses in Lotus Pier. If you’re a radish, you’ll be special,” Wei Wuxian tells him while ruffling his hair.

“What on earth are you teaching this child?” Jiang Cheng huffs. “Maybe you should leave the parenting to Lan Wangji or A-jie.” Wei Wuxian shoots him a warning look too late. Luckily Shijie only laughs shyly.

“I don’t think I’m ready to be a parent yet, but having A-Yuan here has been a joy. He’s adorable!”

“My A-Yuan is the cutest,” Wei Wuxian agrees. If Wen Qing had heard, she’d have scolded him again, but Wei Wuxian has another chance: to reconnect with the Wens as part of his family and also have a chance to officially adopt A-Yuan this time around.

“Is he yours now?” Jiang Cheng snorts, but his eyes seem to soften at the thought of having another nephew. Shijie smiles as well. She leaves to bring the bowl and dishes back to the kitchen.

“I’ll go practice archery now that my tummy is full.” Wei Wuxian stretches and stands.

“You’ll be fine with it?”

“Yes..uh well I didn’t tell you both sooner but I can already feel a core. It’s extremely faint.”

“Wen Qing already told us.” Jiang Cheng crosses his arms across his chest. “She’s more reliable when answering all of our questions.”

“Jiang Cheng,” Wei Wuxian exclaims in mock offense. “I’m hurt.”

“I’m only speaking the truth,” Jiang Cheng says dryly. Wei Wuxian sighs, knowing his brother was right. Both of them were still struggling to communicate *fully*, but they were both trying, more than they ever did in the old timeline.

“I need to prepare for the Phoenix Mountain Hunt anyways, so I’ll have to practice.” Wei Wuxian pauses before speaking again. “It’s not a good idea to bring Wen Ning...is it?”

“What? Why?” Jiang Cheng raises his eyebrows at him.

“Wen Ning is a good archer. Better than me. But we don’t want to attract too much attention from Jin Guangshan.” He doesn’t say the rest of what he’s thinking but the look in Jiang Cheng’s eyes tells him he knows.

“Have him teach you if he’s so good.” Jiang Cheng sips his tea. “Maybe you’ll be as good as him by the time the nighthunt comes around. And you’re right, we don’t want to attract too much attention. Bringing Wen Ning wouldn’t be a good idea. He’s too recognizable, even if we gave him a pair of Yunmeng Jiang robes to wear.”

“Jin Zixun?”

Jiang Cheng nods grimly. Wei Wuxian suddenly remembers what had transpired the last time he'd attended the Phoenix Mountain Hunt, in particular what had happened with Jin Zixun.

"Never mind then...it was just a random thought. I want to avoid Jin Zixun as well. Last time..." Wei Wuxian grimaces. "I caused a scene."

"When do you not?" Jiang Cheng snorts. "You and Lan Wangji will be talked about a lot after the Phoenix Mountain Hunt if it all goes down like I think it would."

"I'll try my best *not* to act shameless then, Sect leader." Wei Wuxian grins widely. He scrambles away before Jiang Cheng can aim a hit at his shoulder.

~

Jiang Cheng visits the Ancestral Hall with his sister after lunch. Seeing the already burning incense sticks, he knows that Wei Wuxian had paid a visit earlier before going to practice his archery.

"We always wanted to call A-Xian our brother in public. Now we can really do it," A-jie says with a wistful expression on her face.

"You never let Mother stop you," Jiang Cheng says pointedly. "At least...at home."

"Not entirely true...I was affected by Mother just like you and A-Xian were," A-jie replies.

"We make our own decisions now," Jiang Cheng says mildly. He glances upwards at the ancestral tablets of his parents. He remembers what he'd said in the Ancestral Hall when he'd first lit incense sticks for his parents after his coronation as sect leader.

A-Niang, I know you never wanted me or A-jie to call Wei Wuxian our brother, but we've never considered him as a servant like you wanted us to. We always made our own choice when considering what Wei Wuxian meant to us. You may not know it, but Wei Wuxian sacrificed more than you could ever know for this sect and...me. This time, it's our turn. In order to be a strong sect leader, I must be strong enough to protect the sect and my siblings as well. We must stay together and work together in order to bring unity to the sect. I will keep the sect together and protect everything I have left.

"Mother and Father both told Wei Wuxian to protect the two of us," he had said after they'd finished lighting the incense sticks. "But no one told anyone to protect *him*. I didn't understand it. Father knew we were close..from the day he brought Wei Wuxian home, he told me that he'd be my brother. So why..." His voice had trailed off when A-jie squeezed his hands.

"You're the sect leader now. No one can tell you he is not your brother, *our* brother. We made a promise to stay together and that's what we will do. We'll protect one another."

“A-Cheng, about Wen Qing,” His sister says. “You gave her that comb because you wanted to offer her help, right?”

Jiang Cheng flushes, “It’s not... *just* that. I...” He swallows. “I know what it means to give a comb to someone. I wouldn’t have done it if I hadn’t known.”

“Then go to her.”

Jiang Cheng blinks.

“What?”

“Mother and Father...they had a difficult relationship and marriage. They always argued. For my marriage, I want to be happy. I want yours and A-Xian’s wedding to be glamorous and joyous.”

“Lan Wangji is already courting Wei Wuxian,” Jiang Cheng murmurs. “It won’t be long until he marries. He’d have to leave us...won’t he?”

“Not really. He’s still *here* .”

Alive..he’s still alive. Jiang Cheng finishes her thoughts.

“I could always have Lan Wangji marry into the Jiang sect,” he declares. “But there’ll have to be some debate with Zewu-jun about that.”

“And you?” A-jie asks softly. “You should talk to Wen Qing. I’ve seen the way you look at her. Back when we were studying at Cloud Recesses and now too. You wanted to find a way to protect her, even after what the Wens did.”

“I can’t hold all of them responsible,” Jiang Cheng replies. “Besides she...she helped us. It’s true that I admire her. She’s a gifted healer and she’s willing to protect her family at all costs. She’s resilient and headstrong.”

“Much like you.”

“Much like me,” Jiang Cheng agrees. His eyes drift up to the tablets of his parents.

Would Father have approved of my decision? Would Mother?

“Father would be proud of you,” A-jie says as if she can read his thoughts. “Mother as well. You’re growing up to be the amazing sect leader I always knew you’d be, A-Cheng.”

His heart swells at the praise. That’s right, his siblings had never held back from praising him and sharing kind words of him. However bad they were at communicating, they were always sincere with one another.

“Mother would have liked Wen Qing,” Jiang Cheng says quietly. “They’re quite alike in a way.”

But different at the same time,” A-jie says with a smile. “I can see why you like her. She will be a good sect lady. I approve of her.”

“A-jie??” Jiang Cheng jolts and stares at her, startled.

“Go to her. I won’t keep you here any longer.” A-jie pulls him to his feet and gently pushes him to the entrance of the ancestral hall. With one last glance at his parents’ tablets, he finally walks out. It doesn’t take long for Jiang Cheng to find Wen Qing. She was in one of the side courtyards, tending to her herb and medicine garden.

“Wen Qing.” Jiang Cheng approaches her, slowly and hesitantly.

“Sect leader Jiang.” She bows to him

“If I can call you Wen Qing, you can call me Jiang Cheng,” He says evenly. Wen Qing blinks.

“Is that appropriate?”

“How will it not be if we are to marry?” Yes, Jiang Cheng hasn’t forgotten. He remembered what Wen Qing had said during the Sunshot Campaign. But at the time, Jiang Cheng knew she had agreed as a last resort to protect her family. He knows she didn’t love him like he did her. However, even back then, he wondered if he deserved her. Even *now* when her family is safe and sound, he wonders if he’ll be able to protect her this time. The threat of the Jin sect wasn’t entirely gone, Jiang Cheng knows that.

“You really wished to marry me?”

“Of course!”

“Won’t you ask me?” Wen Qing looks at him calmly. Jiang Cheng swallows.

“I don’t know if you want to marry me....do you? You agreed back then but I wanted to ask you again some day. To make it real.”

“Was it not real back then?”

“It was!” Jiang Cheng exclaims a little too loudly. “For me...but what about for you? Was it what you truly wanted? Did you want to become my sect lady?”

“Back then, I was a Wen, hated by the entire cultivation world. I didn’t want to put your sect into even more jeopardy...my sect had already hurt you enough.” She shakes her head.

“Your Dafan Wens didn’t hurt anyone. They are more of your sect than Wen Ruohan’s Wens ever was. I still gave you the comb...that day in the dungeon. I know what it means to give a comb to a girl.”

“I remember that day,” Wen Qing nods. “I...didn’t know what to make of it. I knew the war would be evitable. I knew it wasn’t the right time for *that* kind of love. I was focused on keeping my family safe. Then Lotus Pier burned and I thought you’d want nothing to do with

me. But instead, you chose to find a way to protect me. Even though the other sects swore to wipe out all the Wens.”

“We owed you that much,” Jiang Cheng says. “But that’s not the only reason I wanted to protect you. I was offering you a place within my sect by giving you that comb. Your family is part of Lotus Pier now...but becoming my sect lady, that’s your own choice. You said it wasn’t the time because of the war. What about now?”

“Right now, aren’t you more focused on marrying your sister into the Jin sect?” Wen Qing says quietly.

“The engagement was broken off,” Jiang Cheng begins awkwardly. “But..I know how she feels about him. And Young Master Jin’s attitude has changed.”

“War changes all of us,” Wen Qing answers evenly. Jiang Cheng nods in silent agreement.

“If you do marry me...what would the other sects think? Especially Jin Guangshan.” Jiang Cheng snorts at the name.

“The other sects do not dictate the Jiang sect’s decisions. Why is it any of their business who I choose to wed. The Jin sect has been losing their footing since the labor camps were discovered. Besides, would they dare start a war with the Jiang sect over this small matter and risk the other sects attacking them? It’ll take more than this to convince the other sects to attack us.”

“Why do you want me to be your sect lady? Why choose *me* ?”

“We have similar morals,” Jiang Cheng states. “We’re both willing to do anything to protect our families. I know what Wei Wuxian sacrificed for me. I only wished that he didn’t have to go so far...especially after what *I* sacrificed for him.” Too late, he realizes what he had said. He watches as Wen Qing’s observant gaze turns to shock.

“What are you talking about?”

“I distracted the Wens for him. That’s how I lost my core,” Jiang Cheng confesses. “I know I was...upset about it but I didn’t regret it. I was only angry that I couldn’t take revenge. Knowing what my brother did... knowing what he sacrificed, the only regret I had was that I couldn’t protect him. That I *didn’t* protect him.”

“Why are you speaking in the past tense?” Wen Qing asks softly. “Aren’t you doing what you can to protect him now?”

“Yes,” Jiang Cheng says, swallowing nervously at the slipup he had made.

“You always said Wei Wuxian always played the hero, but you ran out and got caught by the Wens for him. It’s clear there isn’t anything you wouldn’t do for him. I always thought you...and Wei Wuxian had a strained relationship.”

*We do. We **did** . Both of siblings are rash...A-jie ran out onto a battlefield just to protect him.*

“It’s in the past,” Jiang Cheng breathes out. “I don’t have time to be jealous. He and A-jie are all I have left as a family. And if...if you’ll accept, then you and your family can be a part of it as well. In a way, you already have become a part of the family.”

“I don’t think that’s entirely true,” Wen Qing murmurs. “My family...my uncle sent people to murder your sect members. How can they think of me as family?”

“My sect members can differentiate who is evil and who isn’t. It’s only proper that I teach them.”

“You’re different from what I thought you’d be like, Jiang Cheng.”

“It’s like you said.” Jiang Cheng stares into her eyes. He takes a step closer to her. She doesn’t back away, holding her gaze even with his. “War changes people.”

“In a good way?”

“Yes...”

“Good. We both need some good changes in our lives,” Wen Qing murmurs. She’s close enough that Jiang Cheng can hear her heartbeat now. His breath quickens. The kiss is unexpected. He doesn’t flinch, only stands, stiff in shock until he realizes what’s happening. It’s only a quick peck on the lips. And then she’s gone in a flash of purple-red robes, leaving him standing with his heart still beating rapidly against his ribcage.

Chapter End Notes

Congrats to JC for finally talking out his feelings. Our Chengqing is sailing now. I'm still lowkey trying to make it into a slow burn though?? but maybe I don't have the patience for that and I'll have to get rid of the 'slowburn' tag. I feel like it'd work a lot better in the other time-travel fic I am planning for right now.

Thank you all the kudos! and the lovely comments you've left on the previous chapter. I'll try to be better at replying to them. I promise I do read them!

Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the late update! I've been busy packing for college most of the month.

I'm not 100% satisfied with this chapter for some reason, especially the Wangxian reactions. I thought I'd make it more soft and fluffy, but I guess my brain wasn't up for it.

“Jiang Cheng.” Wei Wuxian pokes his head into his brother’s office. “Have you seen Chénqíng? I can’t find it anywhere and I need to pack it.” his brother looks up with a scowl from his paperwork.

“Why would I know where your dumb flute is?” He grumbles. “Isn’t it always with you?”

“It’s supposed to be in my room,” Wei Wuxian replies. “But now I can’t find it.”

“Well, don’t bother *me* about it. Go away.” Jiang Cheng flaps his hands at him. Wei Wuxian huffs and turns to walk away but Jiang Cheng speaks again.

“Before you go to Gusu, do you mind answering all the letters addressed to you first?”

“The ones from the Jin sect asking me to join their sect? I’ve already answered them,” Wei Wuxian replies.

“Oh, was that what those letters were about?” Jiang Cheng scowls deeply.

“Mn.” Wei Wuxian nods. “And from Jin Guangyao...well...let’s just say his Father’s interest in the amulet hasn’t decreased. Though ever since he found out about the labor camps...he’s been spending more time in Unclean Realm than Carp Tower.”

“Is that so? I’m guessing Huaisang has something to do with that.”

“Yes.”

Jiang Cheng makes a clicking sound with his tongue.

“That kid...he really is more than meets the eye, huh?”

“You just realized?” Wei Wuxian laughs.

Jiang Cheng makes an impatient voice.

“Of course not! I’m just saying that this time...he’s really making an effort.”

Wei Wuxian sits down across from him and pours a cup of tea for Jiang Cheng before pouring one for himself. He stares down at the steamy liquid for a long time.

“Aren’t we all?”

“Yeah yeah, don’t get all sentimental. Didn’t I tell you to go away?”

“You’re trying hard for Wen Qing, aren’t you?”

“Wei Wuxian!!”

Wei Wuxian jumps up from the table and runs from the room before Jiang Cheng can find the closest object to hurl at him.

He leaves and looks in other places around Lotus Pier for his flute. He finds Wen Ning and A-Yuan near the hillside, watching the young shidis shoot kites. A-Yuan is still too young to learn how to wield a bow, but he watches them with round eyes.

“A-Yuan,” Wei Wuxian sighs when he sees what the young child is sucking on. “Give Xian-gege his flute back, please.”

“Don’t want to,” A-Yuan whines and shakes his head. “Xian-gege trying to leave.” He sounds upset now.

“I won’t be gone for long, little Lotus,” Wei Wuxian assures him. “Besides, I’m going where Rich-gege is.”

“Let A-Yuan come too!” He runs over and clings onto Wei Wuxian’s ankle.

“You really want to come? Hmm, I’ll consider it. But go ask your Qing-jiejie first, okay?” A-Yuan stares up at him with a decisive look then nods.

“Hmm, okay.” he gives the flute back and Wei Wuxian quickly cleans the drool from it with a handkerchief.

“I’ll go ask my sister,” Wen Ning offers. “Though...I’m not sure how to convince her. What reason would A-Yuan have to go to Gusu for?”

Because that’s his home. Wei Wuxian thinks silently.

“It’ll be safe in Cloud Recesses. Lan Zhan and I won’t let anyone bully him. Lotus Pier is amazing but he should have a change in scenery.”

“Haven’t you always hated Gusu...Cloud Recesses I mean. You complained to me about the rules there.”

“It’s...hard to explain,” Wei Wuxian says after a pause. The Jingshi was his home. His home was *there*, despite all the rules, with Lan Zhan and A-Yuan by his side.

“Is it?” Wen Ning seems to smile teasingly at him. “It’s because of Second Master Lan, isn’t it?”

“Wen Ning...” Wei Wuxian’s face flushes. “Fine...it’s true. I want A-Yuan to see his Rich-gege’s home.”

“I’ll be sure to try and convince my sister then.”

He spends the rest of the afternoon packing for his trip to Gusu..

“Don’t make Grandmaster Lan have qi deviation, alright?” Jiang Cheng says he thrusts the last remaining bundle of clothes at him the next morning. Wei Wuxian smirks.

“I wouldn’t dream of it. I’m sure he’ll learn to tolerate me.” As he says this, he winks. Jiang Cheng rolls his eyes and turns his sharp glare towards the man in white instead.

“And you, Lan Wangji. Try to keep your hands to yourself until the engagement is official, alright?”

“Oi, Jiang Cheng!”

“I’m serious. Maintain some dignity for once!” Wei Wuxian holds back a laugh at his brother’s stern expression. He clearly didn’t want to hear another excuse from Wei Wuxian about ‘already being married’. Right now, to the rest of the cultivation world, they were not married, much less *engaged*. They were only courting. Lan Zhan hums.

“We will have to see.”

“You-!”

“Hey, A-Cheng,” Wei Wuxian cuts in. “What if I brought back another child?”

His brother chokes and sputters at this.

“W-what?”

“Lan Zhan told me there’s a kid there who’s quite a troublemaker. Very un-Lan.”

“You mean Lan Jingyi?” Jiang Cheng mouths at him. Wei Wuxian mouths back a ‘yes’.

“A-Xian wants to adopt another child?” Shijie smiles fondly at him. “But you’ve basically adopted almost all the Wen children we rescued and the ones at the orphanage.”

“Can you really have too many kids? I love them too much. They’re too cute” Shijie laughs softly, hiding her face behind her sleeve while Jiang Cheng makes a face.

“Don’t kidnap any Lan kids *please* . Just go. Send us a message through your communication talisman when you arrive, alright?”

“Of course! And I’ll write letters.”

“You better,” Jiang Cheng demands. “And I’ll be keeping in touch with Zewu-jun too. Any word of mistreatment and I’ll-,”

“Bye, ChengCheng.” Wei Wuxian laughs and blows a kiss at him which immediately makes Jiang Cheng turn his face away with a look of disgust. Shijie however, accepts his kiss and blows one back.

“Call me that again and I’ll flip you off your boat so you can *swim* your way to Gusu,” Jiang Cheng grumbles.

“A-Cheng,” A-jie chides, but she hides a laugh behind her sleeve.

“Lan Zhan won’t let me drown.” Wei Wuxian clings to his hus-, fiancé.

“It should be the other way around! You’re the one who can actually swim!”

“Boys,” A-jie says, her voice calm but firm. Jiang Cheng purses his lips and falls silent.

“Shijie, I’ll be back soon, so don’t worry, okay?”

“Jiejie will always worry about you,” Shijie replies. “But Second Master Lan will take care of you, I know he will.”

“Of course, Madam Jiang.” Lan Zhan bows and blinks steadily at her. Wei Wuxian’s heart swelled. He’d never got to properly introduce Lan Zhan to his sister in the past, not like this at least.

A-Yuan, who is being held in Shijie’s arms, waves with his chubby little hands as Wei Wuxian steps onto the boat.. His heart aches at the sight. He’d been unable to convince Wen Qing this time and had had to explain to A-Yuan that he had to stay with Jiang Cheng. He continues looking backwards until Jiang Cheng, Shijie, and Lotus Pier fades from view. Soon they’re floating down the river

“Lan Zhan! Can we stop by Caiyi Town and get some Emperor’s Smile?”

“Wei Ying.” There’s affection in his voice, but also resignation and firmness.

“Please? Just one jar?”

“Doctor Wen says no alcohol. Or spice.” Lan Zhan’s voice is calm.

“*Lan Zhan*,” Wei Wuxian whines.

“Your brother made me promise to make sure you don’t try to disobey her instructions.”

“*Jiang Cheng* did?” Wei Wuxian sputters.

“Mn.”

Wei Wuxian stares at him for a moment longer before laughing lightly.

*So my brother and husband **can** get along after all..*

Wei Wuxian sighs and sprawls out on the boat, resting his head on Lan Zhan's lap.

"I guess I can't escape rules whether I'm at Lotus Pier or Cloud Recesses. And that place has even *more* rules!"

"Wei Ying is better at following those rules than he thinks."

"You've told me that before and I still don't understand," Wei Wuxian sighs

"Would you like me to explain?" Lan Wangji asks calmly.

"No no...it's alright." Wei Wuxian shakes his head. "If no alcohol then...how about you buy me a basket of loquats?"

"Anything for Wei Ying." Came the reply. Wei Wuxian sticks his leg out in a pout.

"Lan Zhan, I thought lying was forbidden!"

"Anything for Wei Ying that is *good* for him," Lan Wangji counters. "And won't affect his health."

"Hmph." Wei Wuxian sits in silence for the rest of the ride. Lan Zhan patiently peels all the loquats and watches with a warm expression as Wei Wuxian eats them.

"Here." Wei Wuxian reaches forward to feed him. "Open up." Lan Zhan blinks at him before reaching up to take the loquat from his hand and placing it into his mouth.

"Try some of this too." Wei Wuxian rummages through his bag until he finds the lotus seeds his sister had peeled for him the night before.

"How are they?" Wei Wuxian asks as soon as Lan Zhan has popped one into his mouth.

"It is good."

"I'm glad you like it! This may be the only Yunmeng specialty that you can eat. Everything else is *spicy*!"

"Will eat it if Wei Ying wants me to try it."

"Even if *I* cook it?"

"I like everything about Wei Ying. If Wei Ying cooks it for me, I will eat it."

"Hmm really?" Wei Wuxian perks up. "I didn't get to cook for you yet when we were married, but I do want to!"

“Let’s buy ingredients in Caiyi Town then.” Lan Zhan takes one of the paddles and helps to stir their way towards land while Wei Wuxian ties the rope to the pier.

“Lan Zhan, let’s go.”

“Mn.”

It’s close to late noon when they arrive at Cloud Recesses.

“Zewu-jun,” Wei Wuxian greets the man at the gate.

“Young Master Wei,” Lan Xichen returns the greeting with a smile. “Wangji tells me you’re here to heal...and to have him help you.”

Wei Wuxian swallows but he meets the older’s eye steadily.

“Yes...well..my core...”

“Young Master Wei,” Lan Xichen cuts in gently. “You do not need to tell me the details if you don’t wish to...Wangji only told me that you took this...path because you had no choice. The war has taken a toll on all of us and if you do not feel comfortable sharing, you do not have to.”

“Thank you, Zewu-jun.” He looks over at Lan Zhan whose expression is calm as always. They finally walk inside and towards the Jingshi. Wei Wuxian’s heart swells even more at the sight of the house. *Their* house. They go inside and sit.

“Lan Zhan...Wen Qing believes that I can cultivate another core... Shijie believes I can do it too.”

“I believe in Wei Ying as well.”

“I feel like everyone is counting on me...Jiang Cheng is counting on me but I...” Wei Wuxian sighs.

“I believe in you as well.” Lan Zhan cups his hands gently into his.

“I know...but...”

“Wei Ying can do anything if his heart believes in it,” Lan Wangji says slowly.

“That’s....that’s not reliable,” Wei Wuxian mutters.

“Wei Ying’s heart is the most reliable. It is pure and good in every way possible.” Wei Wuxian lets out a soft laugh at that.

“I don’t know if that’s true...you’ve told me that before...I’ve made too many mistakes.”

“Past life,” Lan Wangji says calmly. “Not in this life.”

“Nobody is perfect...except Lan Zhan, of course.”

“Wei Ying is more perfect.”

“You’re Hanguang-jun, the Light-bearing lord! And one of the best cultivators ever! Righteous in every way possible.”

“Wei Ying is also the best and is righteous,” Lan Zhan counters. Wei Wuxian gives up and instead of talking again, plants a kiss on Lan Zhan’s lips. His ears redden.

“Our purpose today is for me to help you heal.”

“How do you know giving me kisses won’t help me heal?”

“Wei Ying.” Lan Zhan sighs, but he obliges and kisses Wei Wuxian back, pulling him into his lap and he does so.

“Now sit properly.” His voice comes out firm and commanding and Wei Wuxian grumbles and sits back up. He straightens out his robes and sits into a lotus position, steadying his breath and qi and closing his eyes. He’s glad he had let Jiang Cheng put the amulet into the sect’s armory. Wei Wuxian secured it himself with a powerful array sealed with his own blood and Jiang Cheng’s. He had, however, brought along Chenqing.

The voices in his head were no longer as loud without the amulet sitting inside his robes close to his heart anymore. He didn’t feel the intensity of the resentful energy, threatening to tear him apart as they curled themselves into his meridians and dantian. Instead he feels the calming energy of Cleansing flow through his body with a feeling of warmth and comfort. His core, however tiny it was now, would help to make the song more effective.

“Lan Zhan, play *our* song next.” Wei Wuxian lifts his flute to his lips.

“Mn.”

The calm melody flows through the Jingshi and all over Cloud Recesses.

That afternoon, Wei Wuxian tries his best to enjoy the food laid out for him. It was hard, eating the food without his usual spiciness. Even when he had married into Gusu, Lan Zhan had allowed him to eat with as much spice as he wanted.

“Lan Zhan, can I at least add some more salt? Please?” He uses his puppy-eyes method on Lan Zhan, something that he knew both his husband and his sister would rarely be able to resist.

“Do as you wish.” Came the reply. He’s passed the salt shaker and Wei Wuxian smiles widely.

“Thank you, Lan Zhan. You really are the best and most doting husband!” He adds some salt to his vegetable dishes and congee before eating.

“It tastes great, Lan Zhan really,” Wei Wuxian tells him earnestly. “It’s made with the best ingredient: Lan Zhan’s love! How can it not be great?”

“Wei Ying...” Lan Zhan’s ears redden again. Wei Wuxian laughs as his husband gets flustered at the comment. His husband was so cute when flustered. And even though they’d been married for a while, he still got embarrassed at Wei Wuxian’s praises with him.

“Lan Zhan, Lan Zhan...what would you do if Jiang Cheng doesn’t want me to leave Lotus Pier?”

“Will take you anyways.” His voice turns slightly colder at the mention of Wei Wuxian’s brother.

“Lan Zhan! Don’t be like that. We’re all trying our best here.”

“Does *Wei Ying* want to leave Lotus Pier?” Lan Zhan looks him straight in the eye.

“I-” Wei Wuxian swallows. Leaving Lotus Pier for the Burial Mounds last time had been one of the most difficult decisions in his life. Living in Lotus Pier again these past months had made him realize how much he missed it being his home.

“If Wei Ying does not want to leave, I will come to Lotus Pier.” Wei Wuxian’s eyes widened in shock.

“Your uncle would never allow that!”

“Will convince him then.”

“Lan Zhan...” Wei Wuxian protests faintly. Both Lotus Pier and the Jingshi was his home. How could he bear choosing between them both?

“Whatever Wei Ying decides in the end, I will support you.”

“Thank you, Lan Zhan...” Wei Wuxian rests his head against his husband’s chest.

“Mn.”

~

“He left me with babysitting duty, A-jie!” Jiang Cheng complains.

“Weren’t you the one who forced him to go to Gusu?”

“Yes, but, I didn’t realize I had to *babysit*,” Jiang Cheng emphasizes the last words. He’d raised Jin Ling for sixteen years, it was true, but that didn’t mean he was, by any means, good with children. In fact, he has a feeling he scares them.

“I’m sure A-Ning can help with that. He’s A-Yuan’s uncle after all.”

“Oh right,” Jiang Cheng says quietly. He hadn’t had much interactions with Wen Ning other than watch him train the disciples in archery.

“And you can also have some bonding time with A-Yuan...if A-Xian is really going to adopt him, you’ll be his uncle too.”

Another nephew . Before Jin Ling...

Jiang Cheng hadn’t considered the possibility last time. He hadn’t thought much about the child who had spent two years living in a dark, sunless, wasteland in another timeline. He’d thought about him far less than he should have. It was a regret that had stayed with him among many others.

“An uncle huh?” Jiang Cheng laughs lightly. “It just makes me feel old being considered an uncle.”

“Well,” A-jie smiles. “I’d be having a nephew before even having a son...or daughter.” Her expression turns wistful and longing. “At this rate, A-Xian might even get married before I do.”

Quite possible if Jin Zixuan doesn’t get his head out of his ass and propose to my sister. Jiang Cheng thinks silently.

“I can help as well, so you do not need to worry. I’m going to be in charge of the orphanage in Yunmeng anyways.”

“How has the construction on that been going?” Jiang Cheng had taken in the Wen children, but there weren’t enough adults to look after so many of them. Additionally, there were war orphans in the villages of Yunmeng as well.

“It’s been going well. Zixuan,” She blushes. “He’s been helping me.”

“Oh?” That’s nice.” *Maybe he will confess before Phoenix Mountain?*

“By the way, what did the sect elders have to say about allowing the Wen children to be trained as Jiang disciples?” A-jie asks. Jiang Cheng sighs, reaching up a hand to rub his temple.

“Mixed responses...most of the children are too young to realize what ‘war’ and ‘death’ means but there *are* slightly older children. The main concerns are about those children.”

“What were the solutions proposed?”

“We’d have to teach them to be loyal to the Jiang sect, of course, but we can’t use force. We need to make sure they don’t feel threatened. Wen Qing’s family have already taken them under their wing.”

“Then we don’t have much to worry about,” A-jie smiles.

“Perhaps we don’t.”

Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

College classes just started for me last week so updates will take a while now!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Lan Zhan and Wei Wuxian spend most of the rest of the month together. Oftentimes, it was Lan Zhan playing Clarity or Cleansing for him. Per Wen Qing's instructions, 'Cleansing' was not to be played for more than half a Shichen. If they cleansed out the resentful energy too quickly, it would worsen the withdrawal symptoms and it could harm him, she'd explained. Wei Wuxian knows that the resentful energy, however harmful it seemed to the eyes of others, is what kept him alive for the months he was in the Burial Mounds. Now, the more his core grew, the less his body needed to rely on resentful energy to keep it sustained.

Every evening, Wei Wuxian and Lan Zhan sit side by side for dual cultivation with Lan Zhan circulating bits of his yang energy to Wei Wuxian. In return, Wei Wuxian pushes his yin energy towards Lan Zhan. The energies, although they usually clash wildly upon contact, when Wei Wuxian spins both energies inside him, he feels strangely warm.

"Lan Zhan, do you feel it too?" Wei Wuxian asks him.

"Mn. They balance out. It is a good sign."

"Lan Zhan...there *is* a more effective way," Wei Wuxian says slowly. "But only if you want to." He bites his lips nervously.

"We've done it before," Lan Zhan replies calmly, though there's an intensity to his stare.

"I know that," Wei Wuxian laughs nervously. "Well...if it's supposed to help me, I bet Jiang Cheng wouldn't complain."

Lan Zhan frowns a little

"Who says he needs to know?" Wei Wuxian lets himself be dragged to the bed, not showing the slightest resistance. The night turns out to be steamy and it is not the only one. For most of the month, they continue with this method of dual cultivation. In a little more than half a month, Wei Wuxian already feels the small orb of a core growing in size. Every morning, he'd meditate in the Jingshi with Lan Zhan. Sometimes they would both go to the Cold Pond together. With each day, he works harder to re-develop his core. Although he is nowhere close to being able to wield a sword again, he holds onto the hope as his progress continues each day.

One night, Wei Wuxian jolts awake, panting and covered in cold sweat. It wasn't from a nightmare this time, but a hollow pain in his core. Wei Wuxian takes deep breaths and tries to calm himself down, not wanting to wake his husband up and worry him. The post-surgery pain had been a common thing for him and it'd gotten even worse in the Burial Mounds with lack of proper nutrition and the resentful energy threatening to eat away at whatever energy he has left. Wen Qing's medicine would be able to ease the pain but not eliminate it entirely. In the past few weeks, it hadn't bothered him. Not until tonight. His core right now isn't strong enough to keep the pain away.

"Wei Ying?"

"Lan Zhan..."

"What's wrong?" Lan Zhan sits up and places a hand on his arm.

"N-nothing," He says hastily. He tries to lie back down but it's in that moment that a sharp pain shoots through his body, making him wince.

"Wei Ying!" Even in the dark, Lan Wangji had noticed. "Are you in pain?"

"No..I'm okay," He insists. Lan Wangji stares him down for a moment before reaching under his pillow for something.

"Here, take one." Wei Wuxian looks down at where he holds a pill in his hand.

"Wen Qing's pill?" He swallows down the pill with a jar of water by the bedside.

"It will help with the pain and help you sleep. I'll use her incense powder as well." Wei Wuxian wants to protest as Lan Wangji moves to get out of bed, but the pill takes effect almost immediately and he sinks back down into the bed. He closes his eyes and tries to sleep again. He hears Lan Wangji humming 'Wangxian' and a pleasant smell fills the room from the incense burner. The smell eventually lures Wei Wuxian into a deep sleep. He sleeps until the late afternoon until the smell of lunch wakes him up.

"Lan Zhan!" He stares down in surprise as the assortment of dishes are placed down in front of him. They all looked like Yunmeng specialties but there'd been arrangements made according to Wen Qing's instructions of Wei Wuxian's diet. Wei Wuxian is saddened to see the lack of red, but he sits down across from his husband without any complaint.

"You made these yourself?"

"Mn. Lady Jiang taught me."

"They taste amazing! Lan Zhan is always so good to me!"

"Mn." Lan Zhan's ears turn red and he quickly drinks a cup of tea to try and hide his expression.

"Lan Zhan, let's go see the bunnies! I'm sad we couldn't have A-Yuan with us this time but..."

“A-Hao can come with us.”

“Huh?”

“Jingyi,” Lan Zhan explains. “He is the same age as A-Yuan. My uncle’s cousin’s son.”

“I see.” Wei Wuxian nods. “I didn’t see how he looked when he was a kid! Tell me, was he as rambunctious as a kid too?”

“Mn. His wife was a disciple from a different sect. No matter what, she always encouraged Jingyi to be free-spirited. His husband tried to change that, but Jingyi always kept his mother’s words close to his heart. In the end, he ended up more like her, despite her not being around to raise him. Even my uncle’s rigid teaching wasn’t enough to change his spirit.”

“He..was an orphan too then?”

“Mn. His parents passed away during the early stages of Sunshot Campaign.”

“But he kept his spirit regardless? He’s a wonderful boy,” Wei Wuxian says softly. “There’s really no way we can adopt him?”

“His grandmother is still around,” Lan Wangji says calmly. “But you can still visit him whenever you want to.”

“Tell me, Lan Zhan. How did...Master Lan think of Jingyi?” Wei Wuxian leans into Lan Zhan’s shoulders.

“He was a good student. Followed the rules well,” Lan Wangji pauses. “Most of the time.”

“More than me?”

Lan Wangji gives him a look. Wei Wuxian laughs.

“I guess he isn’t like a mini me then. Jingyi doesn’t *break* the rules. He twists and finds loopholes.”

“He did not avoid punishment.”

“Oh no...what kind of punishments? They had to follow a thousand more rules. How much worse were they?” Lan Wangji stares him straight in the eyes.

“Rule copying. Handstands.”

It takes Wei Wuxian a few seconds to process what had been said.

“Eh..eh?!? Handstands?!?” Wei Wuxian can’t help but feel lucky.

“Wah, Hanguang-jun....your punishments got even scarier over the years.”

“More beneficial. Helps to build arm strength for sword wielding too,” Lan Wangji replies.

“Hmm...I guess you’re right, but Lan Zhan! Did you have to make A-Yuan to do that too?”

“He never had to do them.”

“H-huh? Not even once?”

“Mn.”

“Our A-Yuan was that good? Of course he’d be. You taught him everything yourself.” The bittersweet feeling had returned. He had missed so many years with A-Yuan

“We’ll teach him together this time.”

“Yes, we will.” Wei Wuxian smiles.

Despite himself, Wei Wuxian only watches the children from a distance. He’s only vaguely aware that Master Lan was watching him intensely. Eventually, Lan Zhan speaks with the caretaker before walking towards Wei Wuxian holding the hand of a young boy.

“Are you A-Yu? Lan Zhan told me all about you!”

“Senior Wei,” A-Haogreets, ducking his head shyly. “Hanguang-jun told me about you.”

“Did he now?” Wei Wuxian glances over at Lan Zhan who’s smiling at him.

“Senior Wei is one of the best cultivators out there! He is incredible!” A-Hao continues enthusiastically.

“One day you will be too,” Wei Wuxian tells him. “A-Yuan is close to your age. Would you like to meet him one day?”

“Yes!” A-Hao nods eagerly without even asking who he was.

“For now, we will go see the rabbits. Let’s go.”

That day, Wei Wuxian and Lan Zhan not only end up taking young Jingyi to the rabbit field, but almost all the younger children. Lan Qiren watches from a distance, not saying anything but the look in his eyes held no resentment, only careful observance.

When the kids were tired from playing and were taken back home, Wei Wuxian is ready to return to the Jingshi when Lan Qiren summons him alone to his room.

“Wei Ying.”

“Don’t worry. It’ll be fine,” Wei Wuxian reassures him. He enters the Hanshi and bows to the man sitting at the table.

“Master Lan.”

“Young Master Wei.”

Wei Wuxian sits, takes a deep breath and waits.

“Wangji tells me you’re reforming a core.”

Wei Wuxian jolts.

“What?” *Lan Zhan wouldn’t tell anyone else, right??*

“Repairing it,” Lan Qiren corrects. “It suffered significant damage when Wen Chao captured you, did it not?”

Oh.

“I-, yes,” Wei Wuxian says, keeping his voice as steady as possible while recovering from the earlier shock.

So he doesn’t know about the Burial Mounds...

He clears his throat.

“When I was at Nightless City too...the resentful energy there damaged my core.”

“How did you come to control the Yin Iron?”

“That’s...I am not sure,” Wei Wuxian says hastily. “At the moment, it was a means to survive...It helped us win the war. I have no wish to continue manipulating resentful energy. Lan Zhan has warned me about how it’d cause harm after all.”

“Good.” Lan Qiren looks satisfied. “We will help you in any way we can then.”

The old me would have been so irritated by now. Wei Wuxian thinks. No, my old self would never have agreed to step foot into Cloud Recesses and now...

“Lan Zhan is helping me. That is more than enough.”

Lan Qiren huffs out in annoyance.

“Since when have you been so close to my nephew?”

“Since Cloud Recesses,” Wei Wuxian answers earnestly. “He’s been a huge support to me lately.” He adds. *What was he going to say? That they were **friends** ? No, that wasn’t right. They were husbands!*

“During the lectures, you would never stop bothering him,” Lan Qiren sniffs. “And he broke rules because of your behavior.”

“I was young then. We are both grown now, are we not?” Wei Wuxian allows an edge to his voice. “We’re both mature and can make the right decisions.”

“I hope so,” Lan Qiren grunts. “Wangji has been...different lately. And I have a feeling it’s because of you. He’s been constantly by your side and tries to find you whenever he has free time.”

“Different isn’t always bad.” Wei Wuxian turns around to see Lan Xichen standing by the doorway.

“Zewu-jun.” Wei Wuxian stands to greet him. Lan Xichen returns the greeting with a gentle smile.

“Like I was saying, Uncle, ‘different isn’t always bad’. It’s true that Wangji has...changed, but he is happier. Tell me, Uncle. How did you feel about Wangji making his first friend?”

Wei Wuxian winces outwardly at the use of the word ‘friend’ but he stays silent, waiting for Master Lan’s response.

“Hmm. You are right,” He says at last. He looks over at Wei Wuxian. “If you truly won’t be a bad influence on him because, as you said, you are more grown now, I will take your word for it. You are dismissed now.” Wei Wuxian stands up and bows, turning to go out the door.

“Xichen, I’d like to continue to speak with you.”

“Apologies Uncle,” Lan Xichen says. “I can not speak for long. A-Yao is arriving soon and I do not want to keep him waiting.”

Wei Wuxian pauses and turns back around.

“Lianfeng-zun is coming?”

“Yes,” Lan Xichen says slowly. “You two...are friends?”

“We are well acquainted,” Wei Wuxian replies after a pause. “Nie-xiong knows him well. He’d spoken highly of him so I decided to try and talk to him.”

“And Nightless City. The two of you...helped one another,” Lan Xichen continues.

“That is correct, Zewu-jun.”

“I hope you do not mind this task then, Young Master Wei. Why don’t you go greet him at the gates? You may bring him to the Yashi afterwards.”

“I do not mind at all,” Wei Wuxian says, bowing. “I shall take my leave now.” He finds himself wandering around Cloud Recesses, refamiliarizing himself with the place he’d just barely begun to call home before the unexpected journey back in time. Other than the addition of a thousand more rules to the Wall of Disciplines, there were not many changes. When he finds himself walking back to the gates, he spots a familiar face.

“Young Master Wei, what a pleasant surprise.”

“Lianfeng-zun,” Wei Wuxian returns the greeting with a nod. “You’re here to visit Zewu-jun?”

“Yes. I have a token of passage.” They walk inside together.

“You and Zewu-jun are sworn brothers, so it’d be understandable,” He pauses. “I heard you were the one who helped him hide when Cloud Recesses burned down.”

“You know about that?” Jin Guangyao blinks at him.

“I heard from Lan Zhan,” Wei Wuxian replies. “You were able to send him the map of Nightless City, right?”

“Yes.” Jin Guangyao swallows. “Sending it to Da-ge wouldn’t have been an option. Not at the time. Even now...I can tell he’s still wary of me.”

“Instead of worrying about that, work hard to earn his trust again.”

Jin Guangyao nods.

“We’ve both been trying, truly. Anyway, Da-ge doesn’t trust my father because he’s ambitious for power. He knows my father has been trying to get me to do things for him but...” He trails off.

“It’s hard to avoid, isn’t it?” Wei Wuxian sighs. “The idea of filial piety and listening to him conflicts with what you think is right. But you’ve already realized that he’s been trying to use you, as you told me the last time we spoke.”

“Better sooner than later...right?”

Wei Wuxian keeps his agreement in his mind. Last time, Jin Guangyao had done many terrible deeds just to gain his father’s approval and to promote his status.

“Carp Tower doesn’t feel much like a home. Unclean Realm...I had Huaisang as a friend at least. Jin Zixuan tries to be nice to me, but I have a feeling he cares about his reputation as well.” Wei Wuxian notices the way he’d tightened his fist into his robes.

“Everyone cares about it in some way. But it should never stop someone from doing the right thing. He can value you as a person based on your actions. It took him a while to see my Shijie for the amazing person she is.” He can’t help but out the last part.

“He is...courting her again? Even though the engagement is broken off?”

“He invited her to the Phoenix Mountain Hunt.”

“I see.”

There’s a pause.

“I heard that Huaisang wants to form a sworn brotherhood with you and Sect leader Jiang.”

“Yes,” Wei Wuxian says. “My shijie too. Nie-xiong, Jiang Cheng and I have been good friends ever since we were young. And Shijie...well, she’s always seen me as her real brother. She’s never had a chance to express it so openly until now.”

“Nie Mingjue is my sworn brother. In a way...we will become closer. Right?”

“Father keeps trying to keep me around. I do not know if it’s because he wants me to do things for him or because he is trying to keep an eye on me,” Jin Guangyao says. “I’ve wanted to visit Unclean Realm before but he...he wanted me to report back to him for certain..things. Things I have a feeling I should not be disclosing to people outside of the Nie sect.

“Spying?”

“Yes...in the beginning, he wanted to use me to try and convince you to give him the Stygian Tiger Amulet.” he shuffles his feet nervously. “He was trying to use our...friendship.”

I knew that would be a risk. That’s why Jiang Cheng warned me about it...

“Jin-xiong...,” Wei Wuxian says carefully. “Is he still asking you about it?”

“No actually.” Jin Guangyao frowns. “But that worries me even more for some reason. Wei-xiong, you need to be careful.” His voice sounds urgent.

“Don’t worry. I am on alert.” He pauses and looks over at the man next to him. “But I want to trust you. I trust Jin Zixuan and MianMian too.”

“Be careful of my cousin especially.” Jin Guangyao’s eyes flicker down before flickering back up again. “Ever since the discovery of the labor camps, Jin Zixun has been constantly trying to do anything to impress my father again. Instead, he’s trying to redeem himself.”

“I have no reason to go anywhere near Jin Zixun,” Wei Wuxian scoffs. “That man isn’t exactly people-friendly.” he glances over at Jin Guangyao. “Has he been giving you a hard time?”

“Yes.” Jin Guangyao grimaces. For once he isn’t trying to hide his disdain behind a dimpled smile. His face is plastered with a dark scowl.

“If Carp Tower is too difficult to stay in then...you can visit Lotus Pier.” He silently braces himself for what Jiang Cheng will say about that. He tells himself to write a letter to him once he gets back to the Jingshi. “Or Cloud Recesses. You seem comfortable around Zewu-jun the most.”

Jin Guangyao’s face flushes at this.

“Of course Er-ge and I are close. We are *sworn* brothers after all. I plan to visit Unclean Realm right afterwards.”

Wei Wuxian opens his mouth to reply, but then suddenly remembers about bringing Jin Guangyao to the Yashi. When they arrive, Lan Xichen is sitting at a table sipping a cup of tea.

“Apologies, Er-ge,” Jin Guangyao says hastily as they enter. “Wei-xiong and I were catching up and lost track of time.”

“My bad, Zewu-jun. We kept you waiting,” Wei Wuxian adds.

“Do not worry. I had a feeling you two had to talk. That is why I asked you to greet A-Yao at the gates, Young Master Wei.”

“I see.” Wei Wuxian nods. “Jin-xiong, I will see you at the Phoenix Mountain Hunt. It’s in a month, is it not?”

“That is correct.” Jin Guangyao gives him a smile. A sincere one.

“A-Yao will be staying here for a few days,” Lan Xichen cuts in. “You will still have time to talk to him if you wish to.”

“Thank you, Zewu-jun. I will be sure to do that.” He bows his head to the both of them and leaves, finally heading for the Jingshi. He sits down, writes the letter to Jiang Cheng as he’d promised, then writes one to Huaisang as well. He then waits until Lan Zhan returns, looking forward to spending another night with his husband.

Chapter End Notes

I didn't plan to make this whole chapter in WWX's POV but I guessed it happened. I wanted to write another nice convo between JGY and WWX (Might edit later in case I repeated things)

Also, I'm not sure if I need a rating change after the things that happen in this chapter?
Lmk in the comments

Next chapter: More in JC's POV, some ChengQing moments, and then it's on to Phoenix Mountain Hunt

Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“A-Yuan, hold it a bit higher, that’s right. Good job!” Jiang Cheng has taken some of his paperwork to do outside on one of the pavilion tables so he can enjoy the weather and work at the same time. In the distance, he sees the older disciples teaching the younger ones how to fly kites while others are in boats out in the lake to pick lotus pods.

“Keep your arms steady, A-Yuan.” Wen Ning moves to hold onto one of his wrists.

“Uncle Ning, why can’t A-Yuan fly that high?”

“If you fly that high, you’ll get blown away by the wind, silly!”

“A-Yuan wants to fly anyway.”

“Just wait a couple more years. Maybe you will be able to get a sword.” As he speaks, Jiang Cheng notices Wen Ning glance briefly in his direction. He’s about to respond when he feels a light tugging at his robes. He looks down and recognizes one of the female children they’d rescued from the camps, peeking out from behind him. She no longer wore the rags she had when he’d first seen her. Now she has on a clean set light gray robes.

“Hey, what’s wrong?” He crouches down to her level. She doesn’t respond, only looks nervously around and keeps her grip on his robes.

“A-Yan, come back here please.” Wen Qing appears at the end of the dock, seemingly breathless after running.

“No,” A-Yan refuses.

“A-Yan,” Wen Qing repeats. “You don’t need to be afraid of the other disciples. They won’t hurt you.”

“No scary yellow men?” The question seems to be directed at Jiang Cheng as the girl is still staring at him with round eyes.

“No, you’re safe here, I promise.” Jiang Cheng takes one of her hands into his palm. “Why don’t you go to Wen Ning? He can teach you how to fly kites.”

A-Yan looks at him, then stares at the floor and shakes her head.

“She’s a little shy,” Wen Qing explains. “Even when playing with kids her age.”

“I see.” Jiang Cheng nods. He looks down at the young girl again. “Why not take her out to the herb garden then? Perhaps she’d be interested in being a healer.”

“Are you suggesting I take on an apprentice?” Wen Qing gives him a thoughtful look.

“It’d be your choice.” Jiang Cheng shrugs. “If you wish to do so, I will allow it.”

“She’s not part of our branch of healers,” Wen Qing begins. “I will let her decide when the time comes.”

“Some of the children are close to twelve or thirteen years of age. Do you know if any of them have formed golden cores?” Jiang Cheng asks

“Mostly the boys,” Wen Qing replies. “A-Zhu, A-Lei, A-Hu. They’re the oldest here. The others are still too young.”

“The sect elders..they were hesitant but they eventually agreed to let them train as disciples. However, they want them all to change surnames...we can’t have disciples with ‘Wen’ as a surname among our ranks.” Jiang Cheng swallows.

“We understand. If not ‘Jiang’, then...why not ‘Wei’?”

“‘Wei’”? Jiang Cheng blinks. Why had he not thought about that?

“Ask your brother first,” Wen Qing adds. “Speak to the children about it too.”

Jiang Cheng is sure his brother would agree if it meant the Wen children would be under protection, but he would write a letter tonight to Gusu.

“Sect leader Jiang, you have a guest.”

Before he can ask who it is, he hears someone calling out to him.

“Jiang-xiong!”

“Nie Huaisang?” Jiang Cheng stares back at the boy in gray. “What brings you here?” He quickly leads him into the Sword Hall and closes the door behind him.

“I’m trying to avoid saber practice of course.” Nie Huaisang sits at one of the tables and starts fanning himself. Jiang Cheng suppresses rolling his eyes in exasperation.

“Are you really?”

“No,” Nie Huaisang says, his tone turning serious. He folds his fan and places it onto the table. “I’m here to tell you that my brother has agreed to the formation of our sworn brotherhood. Or we should call it sworn siblinghood since your sister will also be a part of it.”

“I’m glad to hear that.” Jiang Cheng pauses. “You had more to say than just this, surely?”

“I wanted to discuss it with you in person. It would be more appropriate.” Huaisang opens up his fan again. “Is Lady Jiang here as well?”

“I’ll send someone to fetch her.” the servant who had brought them tea nods once at him before leaving the room again.

“Has Wei-xiong sent you any letters?”

“Yes,” Jiang Cheng replies. “He actually made an effort to send both me and A-jie letters about the improvement of his condition. And also, Lianfeng-zun paid a visit to Cloud Recesses.”

“Are you surprised?”

“No,” Jiang Cheng replies curtly. “The visit wasn’t for him, it was for Zewu-jun. Jin Guangyao was quite close to him after all.”

“Close?” Nie Huaisang snaps his fan shut again and scowls. “Is that really what you would describe as ‘close’? He was close to me as well. He was trusted by me! And my da-ge! And look what happened! Do you really think Jin Guangyao cared about him? He only ever cared for himself!”

“He pushed Zewu-jun away at the temple,” Jiang Cheng finds himself saying without thinking.

“He’s manipulative, don’t fall for his words.”

“Yet you want to give him a second chance.”

Nie Huaisang is quiet for a long time.

“I believe people can change, for better and for worse. Besides...I’m sure Wei-xiong is capable of befriending him. He’s already done a good job.”

“Right...” Jiang Cheng snorts. “Maybe he can befriend Jin Zixun too.” Nie Huaisang laughs at this.

“Now *that* would be quite the stretch. I don’t think even Wei-xiong would be able to pull it off.”

“I don’t think he’d want to *try*,” Jiang Cheng retorts. *Jin Guangyao isn’t even half as bad as Jin Zixun. At least Jin Guangyao is capable of changing...*

“Boys, did you want me for something?” A-jie’s crisp voice interrupts their conversation.

“A-jie,” Jiang Cheng greets.

“Lady Jiang.”

“Is it true then? We’re all sworn siblings now,” A-jie says softly after Jiang Cheng has finished explaining.

“Of course,” Huaisang replies. “My da-ge had no objections. Lately, he’s been quite proud of the progress I made as the second master.”

“I heard you came up with fan cultivation,” A-jie says, with interest sparking in her eyes. “How does it work? Can you show me?”

“I’d love to.” Huaisang glances at Jiang Cheng who nods and leads them to a small, more secluded, training courtyard.

“You may want to stand near the edge,” Huaisang tells them and they do so. Jiang Cheng watches Huaisang’s movements with interest. He is so used to seeing the Nies fight with a more aggressive style that Huaisang’s fluid and delicate movements come as a shock to him. His friend seemed to be moving along with the wind, gentle and light. He holds the fan firmly in one hand and when he turns, he thrust his wrists forward, sending a wave of spiritual energy towards a tree, blowing several leaves off of its branches. The second time he hits the tree with spiritual energy, the entire thing shakes and it even leaves a dent in the bark.

“Nie Huaisang,” Jiang Cheng says sharply. “Don’t cut down the entire tree, alright?”

“Of course,” Nie Huaisang replies back with a wink. “I have another trick up my sleeve. Just watch me.” He raises his arm and jerks his wrist forward again. This time, instead of spiritual energy, several objects fly out from his fan. It happens way too fast for Jiang Cheng to make out what they are, but once they’ve struck the tree, he can see the clear shape of daggers.

“You hid daggers inside your fan?” Jiang Cheng can’t hide his impressed feelings as he says this.

“Isn’t it neat? I heard from Wei-xiong that Lady Wen often hid needles inside her sleeves. I was a bit inspired by her, really. But like, as someone with low spiritual energy, we can’t rely on that to defend ourselves all the time, thus I came up with the idea of having hidden weapons in places where the enemy will never suspect.”

“Do you ever want to try out that technique on the battlefield?” Huaisang shudders at this.,

“I really hope not....”

“Why not? Didn’t you want to make your brother proud?”

“Not everything impressive needs to be on a battlefield,” Huaisang grumbles. “Why can’t people learn to appreciate the beauty in art and music? We all had to learn that too after all. What’s the point of learning it if we put all our focus only on sword fighting or just cultivation?”

“We’re *cultivators* for a reason,” Jiang Cheng points out.

“I can prove my value without weapons, Jiang-xiong.” Nie Huaisang stares right into his eyes as he says this. The words send an unexpected shiver down Jiang Cheng’s spine as their meaning sinks in.

Right, of course. How could I forget?

“You have a fair point, Young Master Nie. There are many ways to show our potential other than through fighting,” A-jie says, a thoughtful look in her eyes.

“Your cooking, Lady Jiang, as an example, certainly is above and beyond,” Huaisang says with a smile.

“Of course it is!” Jiang Cheng quickly agrees.

“Wei-xiong’s cooking on the other hand...”

“It has its potential to poison an entire sect,” Jiang Cheng says helpfully. Huaisang snorts at this while A-jie hides a laugh behind her sleeve.

“To think that the sects are afraid of Wei-xiong and the power of his stygian tiger amulet. I’m sure the Jiang disciples fear his cooking more.”

“That’s why he’s not allowed in the kitchen.”

“For real?”

“I might just make it the first rule of Lotus Pier.”

“You’re being serious?” Nie Huaisang continues to look at him. Jiang Cheng crosses his arms.

“If it has to be put in place for the safety of everyone here, it’s likely I will implement it.”

“A-Cheng,” A-jie laughs. “You can do that, but then you’ll be missing his antics.”

“As *if*,” Jiang Cheng huffs. “I can live my life happily knowing I won’t have to eat his cooking ever again.”

“Jiang-xiong, about the ceremony,” Huaisang changes the subject. “Where would you like to have it? Do you have any thoughts?”

“It can either be here or Unclean Realm,” Jiang Cheng replies. “A-jie, what do you think?”

“It’d be nice having it here at Lotus Pier,” A-jie says with a smile. “I know we’ve just only just rebuilt, but I think it would give the other sects to see that we’re still standing strong.”

“Yes,” Jiang Cheng agrees. “I’ll start preparations right away.” The ceremony won’t nearly be as lavish as the one held for the Venerated Triad, but Jiang Cheng will make sure it’d be celebrated to its fullest.

Now that midterms are over, I hope I will be able to update more often.

Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

(TW for this chapter: mention of sexual assault, specifically what Jin Guangshan did to Qin Su's mother/Madam Qin)

“The seal needs to be destroyed,” Wei Wuxian announces dramatically not even a day after he's settled back home at Lotus Pier.

“Well, obviously,” Jiang Cheng retorts.

“Before the Phoenix Mountain Hunt,” Wei Wuxian adds. Jiang Cheng's eyebrows fly upwards.

“What!? That's in less than a week's time!”

“I am aware of that.”

“Wei Wuxian, you've figured out a way to destroy it so soon? Is it safe?”

“Lan Zhan and I have been planning for a long time in Cloud Recesses. It's the reason I sent a letter asking if I could stay another month.”

“But is it safe?” This time, it's his sister asking the question, her voice persistent and her eyes fixated on him with an unexpectedly intimidating stare. Wei Wuxian licks the side of his lips.

“We're still working on precautionary measures,” He answers truthfully.

“There's no need to rush it,” Jiang Cheng says gruffly. “The other sect leaders know it will be destroyed eventually.”

“Every day we wait, it only gives Jin Guangshan a chance to keep asking for it. And even if it's not the LanLing Jin sect, other sects also coerce for its power.”

“Sure,” Jiang Cheng agrees. “But he can't end up looking suspicious. His reputation is already bad.”

“Once a Chief Cultivator is elected, he won't be able to get his hands on it,” Jiang Yanli cuts in with a calm voice. “Right now, Chifeng-zun and Zewu-jun are the most likely candidates.”

“Right,” Jiang Cheng nods. He then looks at Wei Wuxian again.

“Don't go destroying the amulet alone.”

“Jiang C-,”

“I mean it,” He says sternly. “It’s impossible to control the backlash fully, you know that.”

“A-Xian, what A-Cheng means is that he wants you to be careful. Neither of us want your life to be in danger anymore.”

“Okay Shijie.”

“Also did you hear? Madam Qin exposed Jin Guangshan for what he did to her. The Jin sect is in even more trouble now.”

“She finally went out and said something?”

“She told Madame Jin. The two of them are great friends after all. She passed the news to Jin Zixuan first and then he told me. They plan to expose the news fully at the next discussion conference.”

Oh man. I can't imagine how Madame Jin would have reacted. Wei Wuxian thanks. He is already aware of the temper she had.

“He raped his good friend’s wife. How awful,” Shijie says, her voice darkening with uncharacteristic anger. “I heard that even the elders are involved in this matter.”

“Of course they would be. This also involves Sect leader Qin and his family. “But don’t worry. I’m sure Young Master Jin is capable of fixing everything,” Jiang Cheng says with a faint snort.

“He has MianMian by his side. He’ll be fine,” Wei Wuxian tells him. “Jin Guangyao is there too, isn’t he?”

“Yes...” Jiang Cheng’s brows furrow at the mention of him. “Anyways, the next discussion conference will be held in Qinghe. I’m sure Madame Jin will be eager to expose Jin Guangshan’s crimes to the entire cultivation world.”

“I’m sure Chifeng-zun will take the news well,” Wei Wuxian replies.

“As long as it won’t give him a qi deviation...”

“Enough talking, you two,” Shijie cuts in. “I should make a rule against talking about sect politics during meals. Eat your soup. I made a special variation of bird nest’s soup today.”

The two quickly oblige and after Wei Wuxian finishes lunch he returns to his room to pack his bag. He makes sure to make more than enough talismans, messenger butterflies, and signal flares per Jiang Cheng’s demands. He picks up Chenqing, his fingers running briefly over the smooth black bamboo before he places it into his bag. Then his fingers hover over Suibian and he hesitates.

Nie Huaisang had asked for him to join him for an important mission, the details will be revealed later, he had told Wei Wuxian when he asked where they were going. Wei Wuxian

had complained about the secrecy to Jiang Cheng, who seemed oddly calm about it and had shrugged it off. Jiang Cheng had only agreed to let him go alone because he was meeting someone they both trusted, though Wei Wuxian will not be surprised if his brother secretly sent a few men to trail behind him. He expects Chifeng-zun to do the same for his little brother. When he's done packing, he heads out of his room.

"A-Xian, wait! Don't forget these." Shijie is hurrying towards him with a bag full of what Wei Wuxian knows to be sweet buns and peeled lotus seeds.

"A-Cheng is busy today now so he can't see you off. Make sure you share with Huaisang, okay? And be careful, both of you. If anything happens..."

"Don't worry, Shijie. We will be safe. I promise."

He gets onto the boat and rows towards Caiyi Town where Huaisang is already waiting at the side of the pier for him.

"Wei-xiong, shall we go?" The two of them start walking.

"Where exactly are we going?"

"Mo Manor."

"What?" Wei Wuxian blinks a few times while his friend calmly opens up his fan and starts to fan himself with it.

"Do you not know why?"

"Mo Xuanyu?" Wei Wuxian asks after a while.

"I knew you were smart, Wei-xiong."

Wei Wuxian snorts in reply.

"What was the reason you needed me to come alone? We can't just walk into Mo Manor and take Young Master Mo away."

"Of course not. If Second Madame Mo comes with us willingly....that's another story, right?"

"Still, couldn't we have brought disciples with us?"

"I'm the heir to the Nie sect and you're the head disciple of the Jiang sect," Nie Huaisang says with a flick of his fan. "Why wouldn't they recognize us? Besides, don't you *want* to get away from being watched all the time?"

"I never said I was being watched," Wei Wuxian mutters. But he *can* admit he's been feeling the tug for adventure again not even a month after his return from Cloud Recesses. He also misses Lan Zhan terribly despite the constant letters going back and forth between them.

“Jiang Cheng will let them stay in Lotus Pier. We have more than enough space.

“I could have offered him a place in the Nie sect too,” Nie Huaisang huffs. “It would be nice to be the big brother for once, don’t you think?”

Wei Wuxian fiddles with his flute when he hears this. He knows that Mo Xuanyu had somehow been convinced to perform the soul-sacrificing ritual in order to summon him. He doesn’t believe that Huaisang had directly told him to do it, but he also knew his friend’s involvement wasn’t completely obscure. Of course, whatever relationship they had in the past life will be different this time.

“We’ll be sworn brothers soon. What would you think of me calling you ‘da-ge’?” Wei Wuxian says teasingly, throwing an arm around his friend’s shoulders. Halfway through Yunmeng, they hitch a ride with a man pulling a cart after Huaisang tosses him a small bag of coins.

“Please do *not*,” Nie Huaisang implores.

“Hypocrite,” Wei Wuxian snorts. “Wouldn’t Young Master Mo be calling you Huaisang-ge?”

“That’s not the same! Being called ‘Da-ge’ makes me feel old!”

“Chifeng-zun is not that old.”

“That’s different! Da-ge and I are *years* apart. You and I and Jiang-xiong, we’re all less than a year apart. I’m only two months older than the both of you!”

“It would still be fun.”

“Wei-xiong, why must you tease me? Anyways, we’re here.”

“Already? I thought it would be closer to LanLing.”

“It’s closer to Moling actually.”

“Then...will we be near Gusu?” Wei Wuxian asks, unable to hide the eagerness in his voice.

“It’ll be another half a day’s trip to Gusu...and I’m sure Jiang-xiong wouldn’t appreciate me taking you away for so long.”

“He’ll get used to it...he knows I’ll come back this time...” Wei Wuxian opens up the bag of lotus seeds and shares them with Huaisang.

It’s nightfall by the time they reach Moling. They go to find an inn to stay in. For dinner, they order several dishes of food accompanied by wine and eat their meal in their room.

“Wei-xiong, tsk tsk. Not listening to your doctor’s orders?” Huaisang peeks at him from behind his fan as he watches Wei Wuxian pour wine into the cups.

“I can drink moderately now,” Wei Wuxian replies. “Cheers.” He bumps his cup against his friend’s and downs the drink, enjoying the cooling feeling of the liquid as it goes down his throat.

“And you can eat spicy food again?” Huaisang smiles. “Last time, you didn’t order any. It was a strange sight to see your food not drenched in red on your plate.”

“Yunmeng food is usually spicy anyways,” Wei Wuxian points out. “Jiang Cheng only had the chefs change the recipe slightly.”

“I’m glad to see your appetite going back to normal, Wei-xiong.”

“Nie-xiong...in the past..” Wei Wuxian places down his chopsticks across his bowl. “How long did you know?”

“Wei-xiong, ah, Wei-xiong, you want me to tell you the truth?” Nie Huaisang folds his fan and places it down on the table.

“I am really surprised nobody else found out sooner. I always knew everyone around me was smarter than me, especially when it came to cultivation.”

“Everyone underestimated you,” Wei Wuxian interrupts. “You’re very observant and smarter than everyone thought. Intelligence and skills don’t always come from cultivation.”

“That’s what I told Jiang-xiong the other day! I think I underestimated myself too,” Huaisang says sheepishly. “I never would have thought to be capable of such...revenge.”

“As long as you have a strong drive, I suppose you can accomplish anything.”

“That’s what everyone tells me,” Huaisang sighs. “But when it comes to saber-practice, I don’t have a strong drive at all. That’s why I can’t do it!” Wei Wuxian only snorts in laughter.

“Oh speaking of sabers!” Nie Huaisang finishes his meal and places down his chopstick, looking serious again. “Do you think...you can do anything about Baxia?”

“Baxia? You mean because of the resentful energy?”

“Yes.”

“I can cleanse it with the amulet, but it won’t be a long-term solution.” Wei Wuxian eyes Huaisang’s fan thoughtfully.

“You think you can convince your brother to change your sect’s cultivation style to fans?”

“What! Wei-xiong, you must be joking!”

“You impressed him by inventing an entire new form of cultivation, didn’t you?”

“I-I haven’t even told him.”

“Have courage, Huaisang. I’m sure he will be happy that you’re doing *some* form of cultivation.”

“I don’t know,” Huaisang sighs. “You know how the older generation feel about cultivation that is different and not conforming to *their* standards. What if he reacts badly?”

Wei Wuxian sits there, letting his friend’s word sink in. He is right. Of course, his kind of cultivation is considered evil and the wicked path. It is very different from what Huaisang intends to implement into his sect in the near future.

“First, won’t you have to reveal that you know about the Sabre tomb?”

“I’ll figure that out another time,” Huaisang says. He stands up and walks over to the bed on the opposite side of the room. “For now, we need to focus on what to say at Mo Manor tomorrow. We can discuss the sabre tomb at another time. All this talking is making me tired.” There’s a grumble in his voice.

“Yeah yeah, I know.” Wei Wuxian stands up and stretches. He slips behind a folding screen to change into his sleeping gown before blowing out the candles, immediately enveloping them into darkness. He curls up into the blankets and falls asleep within seconds.

Chapter End Notes

A bit of a lowkey/chill chapter. I did not mean to make it like 90% convo between NHS and WWX but I guess it happened. The next chapter should be exciting though! :D We're finally gonna see Mo Xuanyu!! And I will give him the happy and loving family that he deserves.

Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Welcome, Young Masters. What brings you all the way to Mo Manor?” Madame Mo greets them and lets them inside. Wei Wuxian and Huaisang take their seats and the servants immediately place tea and various snacks on the table. Madame Mo in her youth, Wei Wuxian notices, is not much different from the madames he had seen in various other sects. Though however prettier she looks now, Wei Wuxian knows her heart doesn’t quite reflect the same beauty.

“I am here to recruit on behalf of Yunmeng Jiang,” Wei Wuxian tells her. “My sect leader has sent me to look for more cultivators.”

“Oh of course!” Madame Mo beams at those words and beckons a young man forward. “My son here is quite talented. I am sure that he will be a wonderful contribution to your sect!”

“Of course,” Wei Wuxian says smoothly. “However, is this the only young master in the house? I’ve heard of another...someone called Mo Xuanyu.” At those words, the smile on Madame Mo’s face seemed to falter.

“Him? Surely not?” She lets out a half-laugh.

“As far as I know, Mo Xuanyu is much younger and will still have time to form a golden core at his age. Your son...” Wei Wuxian keeps his tone polite. “I’m afraid he’s passed the age to properly form one. It will be difficult for him to catch up.”

“But surely, you want someone more capable than the son of a-,” Madame Mo breaks off, clearing her throat and smoothing out her robes.

“Someone go fetch them then, please? If these Young Masters are so interested in them.” There’s a strain in Madame Mo’s first but she keeps a polite smile all the same. Mo Yuan however, is openly scowling, looking angry and upset. A servant leaves the room and a few moments later, comes back with a frail-looking woman and a young boy who hides behind her legs.

“Young Masters, for what reason do you wish to see this humble servant?”

Wei Wuxian and Nie Huaisang quickly introduce themselves.

“We’re here to give you an offer. More specifically your son.”

“I heard that Mo Xuanyu is Jin Guangshan’s son, is he not?” Nie Huaisang asks with his face half-hidden behind his fan. Wei Wuxian gives him a sideways warning glance not to say too much. Second Madame Mo looks up in shock.

“You knew? *How*?”

“Well..I do have friends within the Jin sect. My big brother is the sworn brother with another one of Jin Guangshan’s sons.”

“I see. Then...” Second Madame Mo looks hopeful. “Has he sent you to bring us to Carp Tower?” Nie Huaisang and Wei Wuxian exchange looks.

“Actually, I wish to invite you both to stay at Lotus Pier. The Jiang sect is more than willing to accept your son as a training cultivator.”

“Lotus Pier? But I thought...”

“Second Madame Mo,” Huaisang cuts in. “I am not sure if you have heard, but right now, the Jin sect’s reputation is not the best. Sect leader Jin has been found guilty of war crimes including keeping young children and women in labor camps.”

“They were Wens, were they not?” Madame Mo says with a sniff. Wei Wuxian narrows his eyes at her.

“And that excuses the abuse and torture of innocent children?” Madame Mo gulps and shrinks under his fierce glare. “Madame Mo, I have heard rumors of the treatment towards Young Master Mo and his mother here. I only hope that those rumors are not true.”

“Young Master Wei, she is my half-sister.” There seems to be a strain in Madame Mo’s voice as she speaks. “Why wouldn’t I treat my own family members well?” Wei Wuxian simply turns towards Second Madame Mo instead.

“Second Madame Mo, we will give you the choice between staying here and coming with us. After all, we do not have a say in your son’s future.”

“I..” Mo An swallows, eyes darting nervously to Madame Mo. “I can not bring myself to refuse such an offer. Is...is what you say about Sect leader Jin really true?”

“It is,” Huaisang replies. “I can assure you that Lotus Pier is a much more pleasant place to stay. There are other children around Young Master Mo’s age at Lotus Pier, war refugees. I’m sure your son would be happy to be in a place where he would be able to make friends. That is far more than what Carp Tower could ever offer.” Wei Wuxian notices that his friend had very carefully left out the fact that these war refugees were Wens.

“Then I will accept,” Mo An bows low with her hands folded in front of her.

“I am glad. We will give you time to pack any belongings you may have.” Mo An bows again and taking her son by his hand, walks away without even looking at Madame Mo, whose expression is filled with outrage and disbelief. Still she forces a polite smile when addressing Wei Wuxian and Nie Huaisang.

“Young Master! Why don’t you stay for the night? I’m sure your journey has been tiring.” Wei Wuxian smiles politely.

“There is no need, Madame Mo, but thank you for the offer.” he turns to leave then stops. “There is one thing I must ask about.”

“What is it?”

“When I arrived, I did catch sight of a very fine donkey. I am interested in buying it from you.”

“The donkey?” Madame Mo looks confused. “What would a Young Master like you want with a donkey? Surely you would want a horse instead if you wish to travel?”

“I am a man who likes unusual and unique things. I simply think a horse would be too ordinary if everyone else owns one.” Wei Wuxian laughs quietly. “What price would you like?”

“Oh you can take it,” Madame Mo says with a wave of her hands. “That thing is not worth your money. It’s noisy and refuses to obey anyone. Just take it off our hands.” It’s clear that Madame Mo had reached her limit given her rude behavior. Wei Wuxian bows in thanks and hurries out, unable to keep down his excitement of seeing Lil’ Apple again.

“Nie-xiong! She’s so much smaller!”

“Of course she is, Wei-xiong. She’s thirteen years younger!” Nie Huaisang snorts with amusement. Wei Wuxian rummages through his qiankun pouch until he finds what he is looking for: a red apple. The donkey immediately perks up and makes her way towards him. She greedily eats the apple from his hand, then starts nosing around his robes and pockets, looking for more.

“Hey hey, be patient, okay?” Wei Wuxian hands the next apple to Huaisang. Meanwhile, he takes a third apple from his bag and ties it to a stick and a string, much like he had done when he had first attempted to get Lil’ Apple to move.

“Is this really necessary?” Huaisang sighs in exaggeration. “Hey stop that!! That’s my fan not your food! AGH, NOOO. WEI-XIONG, CONTROL YOUR DONKEY.”

“Just give me a few more seconds!”

“A few more seconds?? My fan will be gone by then! Do you know where I got this fan from? Are you going to be able to afford buying me another?! Huh??” Huaisang’s face is red with anger.

“Oh for heaven’s sake, calm *down* .” Wei Wuxian dangles the apple in front of Lil Apple, immediately turns her attention towards him.

“Now we just need to figure out how to get her onto a boat...”

“We might as well go back on foot,” Nie Huaisang says as he watches the donkey struggle against his reigns with wary eyes. “She looks like she’ll tip the boat over before we even leave the docks.

“We have to get onto a boat to reach Lotus Pier anyways,” Wei Wuxian points out with a frown as he finally manages to mound onto the donkey. “Get on.” He inclines his head.

“No thanks, I’ll walk. I don’t need to go back to Unclean Realm with a broken rib.”

“She’ll behave! And I’ve never fallen off of her before!”

“That’s because your Hanguang-jun would have caught you each time!” Huaisang huffs. Wei Wuxian flushes. That is true.

“Whatever. If we’re going by foot, then we should go now. We’ll deal with the boat situation once we reach Yunmeng. Help me send a butterfly message to Jiang Cheng, won’t you?”

“Sure,” Huaisang replies. He sends it off and watches it fly away before they get on the road again.

~

“Sect leader.” A disciple approaches him. “Sect leader Yao is here to discuss diplomacy again.” Jiang Cheng sets aside the last of his paper into the pile next to him and stands up. Of course Wei Wuxian had to be out of Lotus Pier the day Sect leader *Yao* came to visit, Jiang Cheng thinks with annoyance.

From the floor, A-Yuan looks up from where he is painting something onto a piece of paper. The young boy had surprisingly been attached to him since Wei Wuxian’s departure. And with Wen Qing and Wen Ning busying themselves in the infirmary and the rest of his relatives doing their own work in the village of Lotus Pier, Jiang Cheng had found himself looking after the young boy. It brings a sense of familiarity to him that makes him realize how much he misses his other nephew.

“Take A-Yuan somewhere, won’t you?” He tells the disciple. “This shouldn’t take too long hopefully.”

“A-Yuan go?” The boy looks solemn as he glances between him and the disciple standing by the door.

“Just for now,” Jiang Cheng tells him. The boy gets up from the floor, diligently picking up the brushes and ink too.

“For Cheng-gege.” He stretches his hands up to Jiang Cheng the best he can and Jiang Cheng takes the paper from him before the disciple takes the boy’s hands and walks him out from the room. Jiang Cheng glances down at the painting. It has the neatness of any art done by a four-year old boy. There’s a crowd of people painting in the background while there are six people standing out in the front. Three in purple robes and two others in red. There is one other person in white robes.

He even drew Lan Wangji . Jiang Cheng thinks with a twang of amusement. The boy has painted himself with purple robes, Jiang Cheng notices, his heart feeling warm. But A-Yuan has added his own Lan forehead ribbon onto his head.

I know they would want to live in Cloud Recesses. Wei Wuxian and A-Yuan both. Jiang Cheng thinks with a heavy heart. *It's only to be expected.* But that will not stop Jiang Cheng from allowing the boy to wear Jiang colors. Once he's old enough, he will be given a clarity bell too, Jiang Cheng decides. Perhaps he can ask the tailors to create a customized robe that will represent both the sects. Both A-Yuan and Wei Wuxian will have Lotus Pier and Cloud Recesses as their home.

He carefully puts the painting onto his desk and heads towards Sword Hall. He greets Sect leader Yao upon entering and the greeting is returned respectfully.

"I see your sect is rebuilding quite well. Your father would be proud," Sect leader Yao says as Jiang Cheng sits himself down on the lotus throne.

"Thank you for saying that, Sect leader Yao. I've made sure to uphold all the values of my sect and those my father taught me. I wouldn't have been able to do it without their guidance."

"Yes, Sect leader Jiang is quite generous to take in so many refugees despite struggling to care for his own." Jiang Cheng narrows his eyes.

"We're all helping one another, are we not? The Nie and Lan sect has also taken in war refugees. We're all doing our best. Now," He clears his throat. "What were you going to say about trade? Is this about my brother's inventions again?" he can't help but feel a twang of satisfaction at Sect leader Yao's flustered expression. He had been one of the people who had spoken out the most about Wei Wuxian's cultivation, but at the same time, the inventions he made had proved to be beneficial enough for his sect that he had established a trade alliance with the Jiangs. In fact, the demand for them had increased even more since Jin Guangshan's crimes had been exposed.

"It wasn't that. I wondered if it would be appropriate to discuss how we will be able to manage without the Jin sect. After all, they were the strongest sect standing after the war and now...it seems we can't rely on them anymore."

"We?" Jiang Cheng can't help but curl his lips. "Are you assuming the Jiang sect has been too dependent on the Jin sect? When we've hardly asked for their help since the war ended?"

"No, of course not. As I said before, I am impressed by just how fast you've rebuilt. But my sect is still a minor sect. We've always been...reliant on the other sects."

"If you need more help, you can ask," Jiang Cheng replies curtly. It is clear to him that Sect leader Yao is too proud to directly ask for help, especially when addressing a sect leader two generations younger than him. He should have been used to such behavior, but right now, he's unable to keep his own annoyance down.

"We have a limit to the supplies we can give, but the additional farmers, merchants, and craftsmen at Lotus Pier have been working hard since their arrival. I'm sure our sect will be able to accommodate you."

"Well then," Sect leader Yao swallows. "Thank you for your generosity."

“My father has always helped you when he was sect leader. It’s only right that I do the same. Will that be all?”

“There is one more thing,” Sect leader Yao says. “But I can see that Head Disciple Jiang isn’t here so I am unable to ask him directly.”

Since when did Sect leader Yao of all people address Wei Wuxian so formally? Things have developed quite interestingly.

“My brother is currently on an errand,” Jiang Cheng tells him. “I can pass on the message upon his return.”

“A few of my disciples were wondering if Young Master Wei accepts commissions for his inventions.”

“I’m not sure,” Jiang Cheng admits. “He’s been creating all sorts of talismans ever since he was young. I’m sure he will never run out of ideas. I’ll be sure to ask him when he’s back in Lotus Pier.”

He sends one of his disciples to escort Sect leader Yao out and Jiang Cheng finally returns to his own office, feeling strangely exhausted. Then again, any meeting with Sect leader Yao always gave him headaches. As soon as he sits down however, he feels something immediately wrap itself around his ankles, startling him.

“A-Yuan? How did you get in here?” Jiang Cheng tries to sound stern as he detaches the child from his leg and places him into his lap. “Why aren’t you with your grandmother or uncle?”

“They won’t play with A-Yuan. Tang-shige and his friends are busy too,” A-Yuan says quietly. He must be referring to the younger disciples, Jiang Cheng thinks. A-Yuan is still too young to start his sword forms. He isn’t even sure if the boy has formed a golden core yet.

“You can stay here then,” Jiang Cheng tells him. “As long as you are quiet. Do you want to ink and brushes again?”

“Mn!” comes the enthusiastic response. No sooner as the boy settled down onto the floor to paint.

“A-Yuan!” A voice calls for the young boy from outside. “Where did you go now?”

“Wen Qing?” Jiang Cheng stands to open the door and is met with a flustered-looking Wen Qing.

“How did A-Yuan get in here?” Wen Qing purses her lips, her expression growing stern. “A-Yuan, come here right now. Don’t you know there are rooms you can’t casually walk into?”

“I don’t mind the company,” Jiang Cheng says. “He’s been behaving himself.”

“A-Yuan has been good! Qing-jiejie, look!” The young Wen presents another painting to Wen Qing, this one of him playing with the Jiang disciples with all of them dressed in purple robes. Wen Qing’s eyes softened ever so slightly at the sight.

“A-Yuan, you have a forehead ribbon.”

“Mn! Like Rich-gege! It’s pretty!”

Wen Qing exchanges a glance with Jiang Cheng, a mixed expression of awe and confusion in her eyes.

“He can stay here if he wants to,” Jiang Cheng says again, but Wen Qing shakes her head.

“No..I don't think it’s proper. Come A-Yuan. It’s time for your naptime. Why don’t you bring the painting to show Uncle Four, Ning-gege, and Granny?”

“Okay.” A-Yuan gives Jiang Cheng one last squeeze around the legs before taking Wen Qing’s hands and allowing her to take him away. Jiang Cheng cleans up and returns to his desk.

He carefully sets aside the painting to one side to make room for his paperwork and letters. Nie Mingjue had sent a letter back agreeing to the date of the sworn brother ceremony, which will be held a week after the Phoenix Mountain hunt. And if things went well after that, his sister and Jin Zixuan’s engagement will be reinstated. This time, the events after the Phoenix Mountain hunt banquet will not bring them trouble.

Chapter End Notes

-Jiang Cheng interacting with A-Yuan is quite sweet, I hoped you like their interactions heh heh. he doesn't want to admit it but he loves the idea of having another nephew! :)

-WEI WUXIAN HAS HIS XIAO PING GUAO BACK Y'ALL NOTHING ELSEEE MATTERS :DDDD. (RIP NHS's fans but sacrifices must be made LOL)

ANYWAYSSSSS

coming up next is the phoenix mountain hunt (finally)

Get ready to see more Wangxian! and more (chaotic?) jiggy and wifi interactions :p

Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

I'm a bit far behind on chapters for all my stories due to finals week, but in due time, I'll be updating as frequently as possible again. Remember to leave a comment!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Jiang Chengggg, we’re back!”

“I already know that! I could hear your donkey all the way from my office!” Jiang Cheng retorts. At the loud voice, Mo Xuanyu immediately shrinks to hide behind his mother who looks equally nervous.

“A-Cheng, there are guests here. Let’s not make a ruckus and welcome them,” Shijie says sternly.

“Xian-gege!” A shrill of delight rings out followed by something crashing into his legs.

“A-Yuan, have you been behaving yourself?” Wei Wuxian immediately scoops up the young boy.

“Mn!”

“My apologies, Second Madame Mo.” Wei Wuxian watches as Jiang Cheng immediately returns to his sect leader demeanor. “And Young Master Mo. Welcome to Lotus Pier. We’ve been expecting you.”

“T-Thank you.”

“I’ll have someone bring you to your room.” Wei Wuxian hands A-Yuan back to his grandmother before walking to his room. Upon entering, his attention is immediately drawn to a stack of paper on his desk.

“Huh.” Wei Wuxian walks over and starts sifting through them.

“Are these *fan letters*?” Wei Wuxian mutters to himself. “And more people asking for commissions...” He sighs. “Maybe I should have told Jiang Cheng I don’t accept anymore.”

“I thought you liked making the money.” A voice says. Jiang Cheng is leaning against the doorframe with his arms crossed over his chest.

“I can’t believe you accepted a commission on my behalf from Sect leader *Yao* !” Wei Wuxian complains loudly.

“What else was I supposed to do? He wasn’t just asking for an item, he was asking for *help*. He went on and on about how he needed more tools and equipment for his disciples.”

“Have you never heard of saying ‘no’?”

“I can’t say no to someone asking for help!” Jiang Cheng throws up his hand in exasperation.

“Boys, are we playing nice?” At his sister’s voice, Wei Wuxian immediately turns his attention towards the door.

“We’re just talking, Shijie. Jiang Cheng told me I got fan letters.”

“A-Xian is just too popular.” Shijie pokes his nose playfully.”

“It’s a good thing Hanguang-jun isn’t here. He will be jealous,” Jiang Cheng snorts.

“Isn’t it about time they made an official arrangement?” Shijie says, smiling widely.

“Shijie!” Wei Wuxian flushes.

“You do like him, don’t you, A-Xian?”

“He’s...great,” Wei Wuxian smiles. “Why wouldn’t I like him?”

“Alright, A-Xian.” Shijie laughs. “Worry about that later. Why don’t you help show Young Master Mo and his mother around?”

“Sure,” Wei Wuxian agrees, then he looks at his siblings. “Jiang Cheng, you do know who his father is, right?”

“You told me it was Sect leader Jin,” Jiang Cheng answers calmly.

“But his mother...” Shijie frowns deeply. “His mother is so much younger than Madame Jin...how come?”

“Yanli-jie, I can explain that for you.” The three of them turn at Huiasang’s voice, who stands in the hallway with his fan in front of his face.

“Sect leader Jin courted her at a very young age. When she was sixteen, in fact.” Shijie gasps, her hand moving to cover her mouth. Nie Huaisang continues while fluttering the fan in front of his face. “Then he left her at Mo Manor with the promise that he would bring her son to Carp Tower once he was of proper age and he would officially recognize him as his son.”

“And how do you know this, A-Sang?”

“I have a few ears inside of Carp Tower. I’ve been a lot more alert ever since the labor camps were discovered...I had exchanged letters with someone else within Mo Manor. She was Young Master Mo’s wetnurse. After I got the information, I had her sent to safety...in case Sect leader Jin wanted to do something.”

“You think he’d have done something to her?” Wei Wuxian asks.

“Well...no,” Huaisang clears his throat. “I’m more worried about Madame Jin’s reaction. After all, Sect leader Jin is currently on house arrest. We already know how she treats Jin Guangyao. I do not want to imagine how she’d treat Xuanyu.”

“But she wouldn’t be harsh on a child, would she?” Jiang Yanli asks gently. “A-Yu is only a few years younger than A-Yuan.”

“Madame Jin may not harm him, but she tends to have a temper, Yanli-jie. And there are others in Carp Tower who may not be too kind to him and his mother. That is why Jiang-xiong agreed to have them stay here.”

“Their company would be nice,” Jiang Yanli smiles. “But would it be safe if I told Young Master Jin about his younger brother? I’m sure he’d like to know...”

“It wouldn’t hurt to tell him,” Jiang Cheng agrees. “But A-jie, I think it’s best to make sure Sect leader Jin doesn’t find out.”

“I understand.” Shijie looks more serious than normal. “He...really courted Second Madame Mo when she was sixteen?” She still looks shaken by the news.

“Jin Guangshan.” Jiang Cheng’s lips curl into a sneer. “We just keep uncovering more and more despicable things about him, don’t we? Mother never liked him. Even Madame Jin...well considering that he always cheats on her with other women...”

“A-Cheng,” Their sister says in a chiding voice. Jiang Cheng falls silent, realizing this is unbecoming of a sect leader.

“A-jie...it’s true...” He mutters. “I know you like Jin Zixuan but he...” Wei Wuxian understands his brother’s worries. He doesn’t like the idea of his shijie living in the same place as that bastard of a man. Even if she’s already done it before, they’re now far more aware of the danger the Jin sect possesses.

“Do not worry, A-Cheng, A-Xian. Your sister can take care of yourself.” Her voice is crisp and calm in a way that surprises Wei Wuxian.

“We believe in you, Shijie.” Wei Wuxian tells her with a nod. “As long as Peacock isn’t anything like his father and as long as he makes you happy...you will like it there right?”

“It is too soon to talk about this, A-Xian,” Shijie says but Wei Wuxian can see the red creeping up his sister’s face.

“A-jie, weren’t you the one who mentioned a marriage between Lan Wangji and Wei Wuxian?”

“Well...if things work out between you and Wen Qing, there may be three weddings happening in our family,” Wei Wuxian says with a cheeky grin which quickly earns him a light punch to the shoulder.

“Wei Wuxian, shut your mouth!”

“You and Lady Wen, huh?” Their sister smiles as well. Jiang Cheng glares at Wei Wuxian who sticks out his tongue in response. He can see a slight flush to Jiang Cheng’s cheeks.

“I don't know who else will marry him, Shijie. He might get blacklisted from the matchmaker's-ow! That hurt!” Wei Wuxian sulks and rubs his arms where Jiang Cheng had punched him.

“I have duties to attend to,” He says at last. “ Wei Wuxian, now that you’re back, I’m putting you back on archery training duty for the disciples. Wen Ning has been working hard in your absence.”

Wei Wuxian nods and the two of them leave his room together, only parting ways to attend to their own duties.

It isn’t long until the day of the Phoenix Mountain Hunt arrives. Wen Qing has surprisingly agreed to let her brother attend the hunt.

Jiang Cheng has instructed Wen Ning to say his surname as ‘Wei’ if asked his identity. When Nie Huaisang had offered to disguise Wen Ning with makeup as a backup plan, Wen Qing had stared at him with such a strong expression that Wei Wuxian had felt chills run down his spine. The month that she spent at Unclean Realm when Wei Wuxian had been in Gusu seemed to have made her more intimidating.

Wen Qing, under the same surname guise, only agrees to let her brother come if she came along as well. Jiang Cheng quickly agrees to her request, looking flustered while doing so.

“It’s a night-hunt so it obviously needs healers,” Jiang Cheng says irritably as Wei Wuxian approaches him for the fifth time with a teasing smile.

“What, are you going to feign an injury to spend time with her?” Wei Wuxian grins and yelps as Jiang Cheng nearly knocks him off his horse.

“Shut it!” He says through gritted teeth. “Or I’m not letting you walk with Lan Wangji.”

“Jiang Cheng!” Wei Wuxian whines.

“I mean it! Who knows if he’ll try to drag you off to somewhere private and do some indec-”

“Lan Zhan!” Wei Wuxian pulls his horse ahead of his brother when he catches sight of familiar white-blue robes.

“Wei Ying.” The man immediately slows down to let Wei Wuxian catch up.

“I missed you, Lan Zhan! I know I only left Cloud Recesses a week ago, but it felt like months!” Wei Wuxian leans against him, balancing precariously on his saddle .

“Mn. Missed Wei Ying too.” Lan Zhan suddenly wraps his arms around Wei Wuxian, pulling him off his horse and onto his own.

“L-Lan Zhan!?” Wei Wuxian finds himself sitting on Lan Zhan’s lap all while the man in white maintains his balance on his horse.

He hears a loud hiss from Jiang Cheng just a few struds behind but Wei Wuxian pays no mind to it. Some hushed whispers come from the crowd.

“Young Master Wei!” Wei Wuxian whips his head up towards the balcony of one of the buildings and he throws his hand up just in time to catch a bouquet of flowers.

“Ah, thank you young maidens!” He smiles up at the ladies until he catches the look on Lan Zhan’s face.

“Ah..Lan Zhan...” Wei Wuxian quickly realizes his mistake. “Lan-er gege, would you like a flower as well? Or I can give you the entire bouquet.”

Lan Zhan stares at him, his face expressionless. Wei Wuxian takes a flower from the bouquet and reaches up to place it into Lan Zhan’s hair. For a few moments, the other man doesn’t move. Just as Wei Wuxian’s finger brushes against his hair, he makes a sudden grab for Wei Wuxian’s wrist, who immediately freezes his movements. Wei Wuxian relaxes his wrist and allows Lan Zhan to shift his hand back to his own hair and tuck the flower there instead.

“Don’t you want one to match?” Wei Wuxian takes another flower and this time, Lan Zhan lets him place it into his hair. They continue forward until they finally reach the sight of the hunt. Lan Zhan hops off with Wei Wuxian still in his arms and doesn’t put him down until they’ve reached the line of disciples. Jiang Cheng has already disappeared to join the rest of the sect leaders, but even from a distance, Wei Wuxian can feel his gaze fixed on him like daggers. Wei Wuxian takes a deep breath and takes his place next to Huaisang and Lan Wangji. His friend seems to have purposely chosen to stand as far away as Jin Zixun. In fact, both the Nie and the Lan sect had chosen to leave a gap between themselves and the Jin sect as a whole.

“Huaisang, did you manage to make your new fan?” Wei Wuxian whispers into his friend’s ears.

“It wasn’t easy,” Huisang tells him. “But Da-ge actually had the weapon’s master make one for me. Can you believe it?” His friend is so excited right now, his eyes shining and practically bouncing on his feet.

“He finally accepted your new cultivation?”

“Well..he did try forcing me to divide my time between saber practice and fan practice.” Some of his excitement dies down into a sulk. “But Lady Wen really came to the rescue. She says that the sabers have been making the qi deviation worse. She’s been trying to find a solution using her previous experience dealing with Wen Ruohan’s use of resentful energy.”

“It’s different when using the resentful energy from beasts.” Wei Wuxian doesn’t really know *how* different it really is to be quite honest. The other sects had never found out about the Nie sect’s use of resentful energy nor had they questioned why every single Nie sect leader had died from qi deviation. Wei Wuxian turns his attention back to the front of the clearing where the targets had been set up for the opening ceremony. Of course this time, there are no Wen

prisoners to be dragged in front of the targets. Wei Wuxian also notices the absence of Jin Zixun. Any remaining worry and anxiety he had left lifted. Wei Wuxian can't forget about how much Jin Zixun had provoked him during the last timeline. Although there is no need for him to barge into the banquet hall this time demanding for the location of Wen Ning, he can't help but feel a lot calmer at the man's lack of absence.

The opening ceremony goes with a calmer and enthusiastic atmosphere. There is no need for Jin Zixun to jump up and shoot the arrow. Instead, he simply stands at a distance and makes his shot like all the disciples before and after him.

"Lan Zhan, can I borrow your forehead ribbon?" Wei Wuxian leans into his arms. He doesn't miss the look that both Jiang Cheng and Huaisang throw at him. Lan Zhan gives him a long look before his hands reach for the back of his head and he starts untying it.

"Wait, Lan Zhan!" Wei Wuxian grabs his arms. "I was only joking..." He keeps his eyes on the man in front of him, suddenly aware of the additional eyes from other disciples that stare in their direction.

"Wei Ying can have it if he needs it," Lan Zhan says calmly.

"N-no, it's fine. Never mind." Wei Wuxian walks away hastily. He should have known not to tease Lan Zhan the same way he did back then. His yet-to-be fiance is a lot bolder now that he was back then! He takes the ribbon from his wrist like he had last time and makes his shot at the bullseye blindfolded. He takes it off and heads back to stand next to Lan Zhan.

After everyone is done, people start filing into the forest, splitting up into the groups.

"Wei-xiong, can't I go with you?" Huaisang whines with a tug on his sleeve. "I don't know anyone else and-" He breaks off as Lan Zhan turns an icy stare in his direction. "I...umm..." He turns away quickly.

"Umm...Wei-ge, I can go with him." Wen Ning's timid voice says. Wei Wuxian nearly forgets that Wen Ning is present among them.

"Sure...be careful alright? Try to stay close to Jiang Cheng if you can and away from the Jins."

"Alright." Gripping his bow in one hand tightly, he gestures for Huaisang to follow him. Wei Wuxian watches as they walk away with a handful of Nie and Jiang disciples close behind them.

Jiang Cheng approaches him just as he and Lan Zhan are about to head towards the trees as well. Wei Wuxian smiles sheepishly, half expecting a lecture for showing off, but instead, Jiang Cheng takes a familiar brown-hilted sword from a qiankun pouch and hands it to him.

"Carry it," Jiang Cheng says before Wei Wuxian can ask him any questions. "Just in case." Wei Wuxian takes it, running his thumb over the smooth surface of the hilt.

"Jin Zixun isn't here."

“I know,” Jiang Cheng replies. “But that doesn’t mean we can’t be careful.” Somehow Jin Zixun’s absence has managed to make Jiang Cheng more tense than relaxed.

“I will look after him.” comes Lan Zhan’s voice at his side. Wei Wuxian watches as the two of them exchange looks, some unspoken message seeming to flicker between their eyes before they both nod at one another.

“I’ll see you at the banquet. Make sure you’re not late this time.”

“Of course, Jiang Cheng. Lan Zhan is always punctual, you don’t need to worry.” Jiang Cheng snorts loudly. He turns to walk away to where his disciples are waiting for him. To Wei Wuxian’s surprise, he can make out the figure of Wen Qing standing among them. Just as Jiang Cheng is halfway to them, he turns his head over his shoulder and shouts,

“And keep yourselves under control!”

Wei Wuxian snickers, sharing a look with Lan Zhan as they both know that Jiang Cheng isn’t talking about his cultivation.

“Lan Zhan, let’s go.”

“Mn.”

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: More wangxian, some ChengQing and some possible JGY and WWX shenanigans.

Chapter 24

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Jiang Cheng's heartbeat had fluttered just a beat faster when Wen Qing had asked if she could come along on the mountain hunt. At first, he had thought she only wanted to come along because of her brother. He never would have expected for her to willingly agree to walk back onto Jin sect territory. However, upon arrival, she didn't head straight over to the medical tent, instead asking to come along with the disciples to collect herbs on the mountainside. Having gained huge respect for her knowledge and skills within Lotus Pier, a few of the other healers have also come along, helping to scour for herbs. Jiang Cheng divides his attention between watching Wen Qing and keeping a look out for prey.

"What kind of herbs are you looking for specifically?" He asks her as she crouches down to dig at something in the grass.

"Ginseng root," She replies. "They grow more in the mountainside than in humid climates."

"Have the herbs in Yunmeng been useful as well? Sufficient enough, I mean."

"Yunmeng has helpful herbs as well," Wen Qing answers. "The wild lavender that grows there has been plentiful."

"I see. What is it used for?" Jiang Cheng is trying to make small-talk now while still trying to focus on the hunt.

"For incense to help with sleep, headaches and exhaustion. It can also be used in baths. They've been helping with your brother's rest as well."

"The ginseng as well?"

Wen Qing nods.

"Do you often need to travel in order to gather herbs?" Other than Qinghe, Wen Qing rarely leaves the premises of the Jiang sect. Although neither the Lan or Nie sect pose a threat to her anymore, there is still the danger of the Jins.

"No," Wen Qing shakes her head. "Before the war, I had my own garden of herbs. I've been growing some of my own as well. It's just...well." Wen Qing slips the herbs she had gathered into her pouch and brushes the dirt off her hands. "I wanted a break. Jin Guangshan isn't here nor is Jin Zixun. I have no worries about being in LanLing. Not when I'm with people I trust."

Jiang Cheng catches her eye as she says this and he lets slip a small smile.

"I'm glad we can be good company then." He scans around the grounds, keeping an eye out for the herbs Wen Qing describes to him as well as prey to hunt. With Lan Wangji being by

Wei Wuxian's side, Jiang Cheng is confident enough that his brother will be kept out of trouble. He pauses for a moment to listen for any sound of a flute. Last time, his brother had drawn a lot of attention to himself after Jin Zixun confronted him for capturing a third of the prey. Although Jin Zixun is not here this time, there is still a chance that someone will complain about it.

The party of healers and cultivators soon go in separate directions after Jiang Cheng helps to chase down several guais and fox-yaos. After securing them in the traps, he hears a loud crash from a distance away followed by shouts of alarm.

"Sect leader, should we check it out? What if Lady Wen bumped into trouble?" A disciple asks him, looking in the direction of the sound. Hearing this, Jiang Cheng unsheathes Sandu and runs. However when he gets there, he's surprised to see Wen Qing and the healers already leaning over the body of an animal. Several disciples who have their swords out are hovering nearby.

"Is everything okay?" As Jiang Cheng approaches, he can now make out the body to be that one of a measuring snake. "Is anyone hurt?" The healers turn to greet him and they shake their heads in response.

"It surprised us," Wen Qing tells him. "It just popped out from the bushes while I was looking for herbs." Despite how calm she sounds, Jiang Cheng can see that she looks a bit shaken up from how she sways as she stands back up. Before he realizes what he's doing, he puts an arm out to steady her.

"Are you hurt?" She looks up at him and shakes her head.

"I had my needles on me...I managed to aim them towards the eye. It got blinded enough so that your disciples could kill it. Luckily it wasn't too big"

Some of the tension leaves his shoulders. Even without a sword, he knows Wen Qing is a capable woman. Until now, he didn't realize medical needles could be used as a weapon.

"It may be best to stay near the foot of the mountain," Jiang Cheng tells her. "In case you encounter other creatures." He knows she's not helpless of course, but the thought of being separated from her when there's danger lurking brings a sense of unease to him, not only because of other creatures but because of Jin disciples. Wen Qing shakes her head firmly.

"I think I will stay with your group from now on. I should have known it wouldn't be wise to wander off alone." She hesitates, her expression uncertain.

"Will A-Ning be alright?"

"He has more than enough disciples with him," Jiang Cheng reassures him. "I gave him a bow as well. If you are unsure, we can go to find him."

"Alright," Wen Qing agrees. "I'm not an expert with night-hunting, but I know where certain beasts or creatures may lurk depending what kind of shrubbery or berries are in the area."

“That is...impressive,” Jiang Cheng comments.

“Whenever I went herb-picking with...disciples, we would encounter certain creatures. It may be different in LanLing, of course, but there are certain herbs with special properties that yaos or guais will feed off of. For example, yao grasses are plentiful in this area. I collected a lot of them earlier on.”

“I noticed that they hang out around areas with soul-gathering grass as well,” Jiang Cheng comments. “Do they have medical properties by any chance?”

“Not that I know of,” Wen Qing replies. “But it somehow helps with A-Ning’s illness.”

“Speaking of illnesses, how is Chifeng-zun’s?”

“I’ve been working on finding a long-term cure. Although it’s a different type of resentful energy, the nature of his episodes is similar to the ones I dealt with for Wen Ruohan.”

“Hopefully it will work out then,” Jiang Cheng says. Knowing how much Huaisang wanted his brother to survive, he had purposely sent Wen Qing to Unclean Realm and unexpectedly, Chifeng-zun had agreed.

“A-Cheng, is that you?”

“A-jie.” Jiang Cheng smiles at his sister. “And Young Master Jin.” His eyes narrow when he realizes they’re alone. Madame Jin must have set them up.

“Sect leader Jiang.” Jin Zixuan bows politely. Jiang Cheng returns the greeting with a curt nod.

“I do not know if this is an appropriate time, but there is something I must ask of you.” Jin Zixuan swallows nervously and when Yanli flashes him an encouraging smile, Jiang CHeng immediately knows what’s coming.”

“If this is about asking permission to marry my sister, let’s wait until after the banquet. Wei Wuxian should be here as well.”

“Then perhaps we should go find him,” His sister suggests.

“The hunt isn’t quite over yet,” Jin Zixuan says. “But it seems like Yunmeng is in the lead for this competition.”

“Who is the biggest contributor?” Jiang Cheng wonders out loud. Why is he getting worried about this? Surely Wei Wuxian didn’t pull off the same thing he did last time?

“I guess we will have to find out.”

They move forward and his sister comes to his side.

“A-Cheng, did you speak with Lady Wen?”

“I did...” Jiang Cheng says. “A-jie, why do you ask me this?”

“I was just thinking.” His sister smiles sweetly at him. “A-Xian is also with Second Master Lan...and A-Xuan just now, he-,”

“A-jie!” Jiang Cheng protests in a hushed whisper. “I know what you want to say but I... maybe later?”

“If you insist, A-Cheng.” His sister falls back into step with Jin Zixuan leaving him flustered by Wen Qing’s side, who had chosen to walk slightly behind him rather than with the rest of the healers. He turns to her and she looks at him with a calm expression in her eyes, given no signs that she’d overheard anything. It’s almost as if she’s...waiting for him to say something.

I’ll talk to her after the banquet. Jiang Cheng promises himself. The rest of the walk is taken in silence.

~

“Lan Zhan, you caught another one!” Wei Wuxian exclaims when they approach the net they had set up just a short moment ago.

“It was Wei Ying who helped.”

“But you caught a lot without my help too!” Wei Wuxian twirls the flute in his hand. Last time, he had been confronted by Jin Zixun for supposedly breaking the rules and catching a third of the prey. This time, however, he carefully divides the prey he summons into both Lan and Jiang nets. He even contributes a few to the Nies.

“Lan Zhan, I know Jiang Cheng told you to stay with me, but I want to explore a bit on my own.”

“Wei Ying.”

“I’ll be fine, Lan Zhan. What could happen?” Lan Zhan gives him a look.

“You’re not still worried about Jin Guangshan and Jin Zixun, are you?”

“They both have many supporters in Carp Tower. Until Jin Zixuan is able to secure his position, we will have to be careful in LanLing territory.” Wei Wuxian considers his words carefully. Both Jiang Cheng and Lan Wangji are still worried despite the absences of the two Jins.

“I hope no Jin disciples recognize Wen Ning,” Wei Wuxian murmurs, suddenly worried.

“Huaisang will protect him.”

“If Huaisang is friends with Wen Ning, I think Chifeng-zun will respect that. Now that he knows Wen Ning is a good person,” Wei Wuxian agrees.

“When will you move forward with the sworn siblinghood ceremony?”

“Oh, Jiang Cheng says we’re doing it after the hunt. The sooner the better right?” Wei Wuxian grins.

“Mn.”

“I wonder if Pea-, if that Jin Zixuan has already courted my sister. I don’t know when it happened since you know...,” Wei Wuxian sighs. “I took the Wens to the Burial Mounds at the time.”

“Shortly after you left,” Lan Zhan tells him. “Lady Jiang did want to go to the Burial Mounds, but Jiang Wanyin insisted on going alone to convince you to come back.”

“Oh then...the two of them must be alone again.” Wei Wuxian has to keep himself from running off and looking for the two of them. The two of them are not married yet and it didn’t feel right for him for them to be alone in the forest together.

“Wei Ying. We are not married yet either,” Lan Wangji says as if reading his thoughts.”

“I know, I know,” Wei Wuxian groans. “Jiang Cheng keeps telling us off for being shameless. What are we going to do?”

“I’ll let Xiongzhang know today that I want to court you.” Wei Wuxian freezes in shock.

“L-Lan Zhan, that’s-,”

“If Wei Ying wishes me to.” Lan Zhan’s gaze is steady, the fondness evident in his eyes.

“Yes...of course!” Wei Wuxian flings himself onto Lan Zhan who catches him easily. “This will be more official...and Shijie will be there too...” Warmness fills his heart.

“Wangji.” Wei Wuxian turns to see Lan Xichen and Jin Guangyao walking towards them side by side. Flustered, he detaches himself from Lan Zhan and bows in greeting.

“Zewu-jun, Lianfeng-zun.”

“Xiongzhang.”

“Wangji, I’m glad I found you.” Lan Xichen smiles. “I believe you have something to tell me. Will you walk with me? A-Yao wishes to catch up with Young Master Wei.” Lan Zhan looks at Wei Wuxian then back at Jin Guangyao. From where Wei Wuxian stands, he can see a subtle wariness in his eyes. Wei Wuxian touches his arm reassuringly.

“Lan Zhan, you did want to talk to your brother right? Go on. Jin-xiong and I will talk.”

“Mn.” Lan Zhan takes one lingering last look at Wei Wuxian before going to his brother’s side.

“Jin-xiong, it seems like Madame Jin allowed you to come to the hunt,” Wei Wuxian says once they’re out of sight and have started walking in the opposite direction.

“My brother,” Jin Guangyao says rather hesitantly, “insisted that I come. He and I had to handle the entire hunt as my father is...unavailable at the moment.”

“She did not give you a hard time, did she?” Jin Guangyao grimaces ever so slightly, his mask of a smile cracking.

“Zixuan keeps me by his side. But Mother’s temper has become better since Father isn’t around.”

“Did she make the decision to put him on house arrest?”

“Yes...she was worried he would still try to scheme. I’m surprised she didn’t put me under house arrest,” Jin Guangyao says quietly. “If it weren’t for Zixuan-ge standing up for me, perhaps she would have. She still doesn’t trust me...because she knows Father wanted to ask me to do many things for him.”

Wei Wuxian notices the close term of address he used for Jin Zixuan.

“You and Jin Zixuan have become closer?”

“He is not like Father,” Jin Guangyao says simply. “He-,” They’re suddenly interrupted by a loud crash from a bush a few feet away from them. Wei Wuxian’s hand shoots to his flute out of reflex while Jin Guangyao reaches towards the inside of his sleeve.

“Could it be a yao? Or a guai?”

“I’ll check it out.” With one hand on his flute and the other reaching for his sword, he approaches the bush which is still wiggling. He pokes aside the leaves with the hilt to reveal a creature with no face.

Huh?!

I'm revealing what the creature is in the next chapter. Don't worry, it's nothing dangerous, it's rather silly/funny really. but WWX getting a creature companion is what I was aiming for 🙄 Stay tuned for more!

Chapter 25

Chapter Notes

Definitions for terms

- a) Jiaozhi means dumpling
- b) Wonton is a type of dumpling
- c) Xiao Zhu means little pig

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“What is that?” Wei Wuxian is too shocked to do anything but stare. Jin Guangyao appears at his side, looking just as perplexed.

“It’s not dangerous, surely?” he questions. “It doesn’t have a face so it can’t have teeth either. It has three pairs of legs and wings...” He studies the creature for a few moments, thinking hard about where he’s seen it.

“I think it’s a hundun,” Wei Wuxian says at last. “They’re what? The embodiments of chaos or something. What’s a mythological creature like this doing in Lanling...or on Phoenix Mountain for that matter.”

“I’ve never heard of any encounters by other people either,” Jin Guangyao comments. Wei Wuxian crouches down next to it in order to observe it further. To his surprise, the creature moves closer to him, seemingly fascinated with the flute in his hands.

“I remember Huaisang telling me that they like music and dancing,” Jin Guangyao continues. “He says he always wanted to meet one.”

“Well, now this is his chance.” Wei Wuxian sets the flute to his lips and plays a small tune. Despite having no visible ears, the hundun seems to perk itself up at the sound.

“I think I’ll keep you,” Wei Wuxian declares, reaching out his hand to pet the hundun who surprisingly doesn’t resist his touch at all; instead it rubs its head against his hand.

“Your sect leader is going to have something to say about this,” Jin Guangyao says pointedly, but there’s a tone of amusement to his voice.

“Well, I guess we’ll find out. Let’s go see if we can bump into him.” They walk together with the hundun flying at Wei Wuxian’s side. Soon he catches sight of familiar purple robes.

“Jiang Cheng, we finally found you! And Huaisang, you’re here too with Wen Ning. Wen Qing too. The whole gang’s here!” Wen Qing promptly rolls her eyes at him.

“Where did you run off to?” Jiang Cheng has on his familiar scowl and his eyes narrow when seeing Jin Guangyao.

“I thought you were with Lan Wangji,” He says flatly.

“He went off with his brother...though I’m sure Zewu-jun will come looking to speak to you soon.”

“About what?” Jiang Cheng gives him a suspicious look.

“Courtship of course.”

“Court- *what* ?” Jiang Cheng sputters.

“Oh A-Xian, that’s wonderful,” His sister exclaims, stepping forward to embrace him. “You’ll have your wedding after mine and A-Xuan’s!” Wei Wuxian blinks as he registers her words.

“Yours and...Peacock proposed to her?!” Wei Wuxian breaks with a yelp.

“Who are you calling Peacock?” Jin Zixuan glares at him. “And also, when did you become so close with my brother?”

“It’s been months,” Wei Wuxian says gleefully. “I thought you’d have known by now.”

“Oh right...I forgot he told me about it,” Jin Zixuan huffs.

“Wei Wuxian, what is that *thing* behind you?” Jiang Cheng points behind him, his expression twisted into confusion and wariness.

“A-Xian?” She pulls away from him and stares at the hundun who’s just hovering there.

“A-Li, be careful!” Jin Zixuan pulls her away, reaching for his sword.

“Hey, relax. It’s nothing dangerous,” Wei Wuxian reassures them.

“That doesn’t explain what it *is* .”

“A hundun. Like in mythology,” Huaisang explains. He’s the only one looking at the creature with an expression of awe and not wariness. “Wei-xiong, did you befriend one?”

“Yes,” Wei Wuxian replies. “I’m keeping it.”

“So you’ve found an animal companion,” Yanli asks, her smile widening.

“I thought Lil’ Apple was your animal companion.” Jiang Cheng crossed his arms. “At least a donkey looks normal. That thing looks like a faceless pig with wings.”

“Jiang Cheng, be nice! It has feelings!”

“Yeah? How can it hear me if it has no ears?”

“How can hunduns be known for liking music if it’s never listened to it before?”

“.....”

“It has ears even though we can’t see them?” Jin Zixuan questions.

“It’s known for liking music,” Huaisang informs him. “Maybe it likes Wei-xiong because of his flute.”

Jiang Cheng stares at the hundun for a while longer before saying,

“You’re cleaning up after it.” He then turns and walks away.

“Hey, Wei-xiong, try sitting on it.”

“What?” Wei Wuxian yelps. He does, however, sit on it. It allows him to get comfortable before raising itself off the ground. Wei Wuxian does *not* like this one bit.

He manages to remain steady on the hundun until the entrance of Carp Tower. He has to admit that sitting on it is more comfortable than balancing on a sword. Perhaps this is how he will get around now instead of having to walk. Afterwards, he quickly ushers the winged creature towards his room, fully aware of the stares he’s been receiving the entire time as he walks through the halls.

“Wei Ying?” Lan Zhan walks up to him, stares questionably at him, then at the hundun. His frown deepens.

“Ah, Lan Zhan. It seems like I have a new creature companion,” Wei Wuxian laughs nervously. The hundun wiggles out from his grasp and rubs his body against Lan Wangji’s legs, making soft cooing noises.

“Wei Ying,” Lan Zhan sighs.

“It wouldn’t stop following me! It’s not my fault, Lan Zhan,” Wei Wuxian whines. Lan Zhan casts a glance at the hundun before looking back at him.

“Will you name it?”

“It’s only right that I give it a name if it’s going to be my companion,” Wei Wuxian replies. “How about Jiaozhi? Or Wonton.”

“Wei Ying.”

“It’s better than naming it Xiao Zhu.” Wei Wuxian says pointedly. “I can’t ask Jiang Cheng for names, he’s terrible at naming things.”

Lan Wangji gives him a wordless stare before he helps him bring the hundun to his room where he locks the room with a seal to prevent it from escaping.

“Let’s go then, shall we?”

“Mn.”

~

Jiang Cheng had really thought he could deal with all of his brother's tactics, but after all these years, he still thought wrong.

“A hundun? Seriously?” Jiang Cheng mutters under his breath. He sees Huaisang casting a concerned look at him from the next table over as he pours himself another cup of wine and downs it one go.

“Aiya, Jiang Cheng, take it easy!” A hand claps down his shoulders. “Save me some, won't you?”

“Shut up, idiot!” Jiang Cheng growls through his teeth back but he pushes the wine towards his brother. Suddenly he feels something wiggling from next to him and suppressed a yelp of alarm when he sees the hundun sitting in between him and his brother.

“I thought you brought it to your room!” He hisses between gritted teeth, trying not to be too loud as to catch the attention of anyone else in the room.

“I did,” Wei Wuxian replies. “It still got out. Even with the seal. It's weird....it's like it's literally attached to me.”

“Let's hope it doesn't eat your soul or something.”

“What do hunduns even *eat* ? Does it even have teeth if it has no mouth?”

“You should put your hand in front of it and find out.”

“Hmm. I'll feed it later. It's oddly well behaved.”

“It's more behaved than that donkey of yours,” Jiang Cheng snorts.

“Lil'Apple behaves if you feed her,” Wei Wuxian replies. Jiang Cheng rolls his eyes at him.

The banquet continues on much smoother than it had the last time. He notices Qin Su's presence this time; she stays close to MianMian and Wen Qing who is surprisingly comfortable in the Jin disciple's presence. There are still other Jin disciples casting hostile looks towards the former Wen sect woman, but she seems to be calmly ignoring them. Huaisang hasn't left Wen Ning's side since they arrived back at Carp Tower and with Nie Mingjue hovering nearby, no Jin disciples dared to harass them. Even without Jin Zixun's and Jin Guangshan's presence, Jiang Cheng is very much aware of how many supporters they both have.

Jiang Cheng himself walks around the banquet hall, offering cheers to various Sect leaders.

“Sect leader Jiang.” Jiang Cheng has been expecting this. He turns to greet Lan Xichen with a courteous bow.

“I’m sure Young Master Wei has already informed you of my brother’s intentions. We should find a time to negotiate the dowry and bride price.”

“Of course,” Jiang Cheng agrees. Glancing past Lan Xichen, he can see Jin Zixuan with Yanli by his side as they both speak to Madame Jin. Automatically, his gaze flickers to Wen Qing before he turns his attention back to the Lan sect leader.

A-jie was right about multiple weddings going around.

“I’m guessing you will be focusing on your sister’s wedding first,” Lan Xichen says with a smile, turning to look behind him as well. “Do not worry, there is still time.”

“Wei Wuxian is set on marrying into the Lan sect. I know this at least,” Jiang Cheng says with a slight pang in his heart. “He wants to adopt A-Yuan as well and raise him as a Lan.”

“You’re referring to the child rescued from the camps? The one Wangji talks most about.” Jiang Cheng notices he is careful not to mention the boy’s surname.

“I’m sure the boy will be a natural Lan. With Lan Wangji as his father,” Jiang Cheng says. “But of course, he will be a Jiang as well.”

“Of course. He is your nephew after all.”

“And will be yours as well,” Jiang Cheng says pointedly.

“Yes. It’s strange however, seeing my baby brother marry before me. I myself have no desire of courting anyone, but if the sect is to have an heir...”

“The elders have been giving you trouble, I assume?” Jiang Cheng questions, suddenly remembering that his own sect elders may start hammering him as well.

“They always seem to.” Lan Xichen gives a tight smile.

“I heard that Jin Guangyao was courting Qin Su.”

“He was. I’m surprised you know. Though I suspect Young Master Wei heard it from him and passed on the news to you.”

“Ah yes he did,” Jiang Cheng replies.

“They found out they were siblings and after Madame Qin confessed about what Sect leader Jin did to her, Sect leader Qin immediately cancelled their engagement.”

“I heard Young Lady Qin is still in shock with what happened.”

“Yes...I know A-Yao spoke highly of her. Perhaps I should get to know her myself.” Lan Xichen nods once to Jiang Cheng before walking away. Looking around the room, Jiang

Cheng is surprised that Wei Wuxian hasn't disappeared somewhere with Lan Wangji yet. Instead he sees his brother with one arm draped around Huaisang's shoulders while Wen Ning seems fascinated in Wei Wuxian's hundun. Lan Wangji, on the other hand, seems to be having a pleasant conversation with Qin Su and his brother. Even Jin Guangyao and Jin Zixuan seem to be getting along. There is no sign of Su She anywhere.

"Jiang Wanyin." Jiang Cheng turns at the sound to see Wen Qing standing there.

"Do you mind walking with me? I feel rather stuffy."

"Sure," Jiang Cheng agrees, suddenly eager to get away from the hall. He ignores the teasing smirk Wei Wuxian gives him as they both leave. As they walk, they happen to stumble into the courtyard where Jin Zixuan had proposed to Yanli in the first timeline. His gaze lingers on the lotus pond that he had made for her. He turns suddenly

"Wen Qing, I-," He falters when Wen Qing looks at him, a look of surprise in her eyes. He swallows.

"I don't know if this is the right time, but I wanted to ask you if..." He takes a deep breath, aware that Wen Qing is still looking at him. He reaches for her hand slowly and carefully. "If you want to be my sect lady."

Wen Qing blinks and smiles at him. He feels her hands enclosing around his fingers.

"Yes."

Chapter End Notes

I found this chapter a bit messy and dull (had writer's block) but I didn't want to delay an update any further. I'll spruce up the action more in the next chapter. There will be a time jump

Info about the hundun!

<https://www.google.com/amp/s/abookofcreatures.com/2015/04/10/dijiang/amp/>

<https://www.godchecker.com/chinese-mythology/HUNDUN/>

<https://indeterminacy.ac.uk/blog/hundun/>

Chapter 26

Chapter Notes

Extra long chapter to make up for the delay! Classes just started for me so updates will be slow again.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Jiang Cheng is moving his head closer to Wen Qing's when he hears shuffling noises nearby. Reflexively, he reaches for his sword, shifting in front of Wen Qing. Even with so many sects gathered in one spot, he will not put it past the Jin sect to have spies lurking around or even assassins. He moves his hand away from his sword, however, when he hears stifling laughter.

"Wei Wuxian!" Jiang Cheng yells. "Get out here right now! I'll break your legs!" He catches sight of black robes disappearing around the corner. It's subtle enough until he sees the weird *hundun* creature following close behind Wei Wuxian. Jiang Cheng fumes, ready to go after him, but he feels a hand on his arm.

"Leave him to his antics," Wen Qing says with fondness in her voice.

"He's going to cause trouble again," Jiang Cheng mutters. It's not the only thing he's worried about. He's not at ease at all about letting his brother roam any part of Carp Tower without an escort.

"Lan Wangji will stay with him."

"Oh absolutely not." Jiang Cheng frowns. "It's improper now that Zewu-jun and I have agreed on his courtship to my brother."

"It's official?" Wen Qing blinks. "Does Lan Qiren know?"

"Well...Zewu-jun didn't mention it." Wen Qing gives a huff of amusement.

"Well..I guess Zewu-jun will have his own internal sect affairs to deal with before we can really start planning, right?"

"Indeed...well we do need to plan A-jie's wedding first."

"Of course. A-Li's wedding needs to be perfect." Wen Qing scowls slightly. "Even if she *is* marry a Jin."

"Jin Zixuan is not like his father. He can be trusted."

“What about Jin Guangyao? I know Wei Wuxian is close with him.” Wen Qing bites her lips, shaking her head. “He could be setting traps, making him let his guard down. You *know* how manipulative the Jins can be. If Wei Wuxian gets hurt...”

“Wei Wuxian never leaves his guard down. He told me himself.” Jiang Cheng reassures her, but his own worries echoes hers.

“Do you trust him that much?”

“For things like this, yes.” Jiang Cheng pauses. “To be honest, Jin Zixun worries me more. We have no idea where he could be.”

“Is he not under house arrest?”

“Which Jin disciple would you trust to guard him? There are too many disciples who still support Jin Guangshan and Jin Zixun. Even if disciples from all four sects are guarding their place...” Jiang Cheng glances around the garden as he speaks. “Perhaps, we should find somewhere quiet to discuss this further.”

“Your quarters or mine,” Wen Qing says, her eyes glinting.

“Whatever works for you.”

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“Jiang Cheng, I was thinking something...it’s kind of crazy but also not crazy.”

“Speak proper words, will you?” Jiang Cheng growls in reply as he spoons congee into his mouth.

“With all the sects gathered here, do you think it will be ideal for me to destroy the amulet while we’re still in Lanling?”

“What?” Jiang Cheng frowns. “Are you serious?”

“I am. Lan Zhan says he will help me. The array is just about completed. I *was* quite busy in Gusu, you know.”

“I find that hard to believe,” Jiang Cheng huffs. “And I don’t think it’s a good idea. It’s too dangerous.”

“The array will contain any backlash,” Wei Wuxian insists. “Come on, shouldn’t I do it before Shijie’s wedding?”

“It’s months away,” Jiang Cheng says pointedly.

“I rather not make her worry when she’s already living in Carp Tower. She’d have to come rushing back to Lotus Pier.

“Those are not the dangers I’m talking about,” Jiang Cheng says tightly. “I don’t like how Jin Guangshan and Jin Zixun are still being held near Carp Tower.”

“We have to be patient and wait for the next discussion conference. It is not ideal to discuss it right now.”

“Then why don’t you wait until then to destroy the amulet? It would give you another month to confirm that the array is strong enough.” Wei Wuxian wants to argue but Jiang Cheng is using the tone he uses when he’s making orders as a sect leader, not requests, therefore, he chooses not to.

“Fine.” He agrees. “I have to help Huaisang with the swords anyways.”

“Are you sure you know what to do? You haven’t even visited Qinghe once to check out the temple again.”

“I was going to,” Wei Wuxian says. “But I didn’t want to be away from Lotus Pier too much. You know...duty calls.” Jiang Cheng gives a snort of amusement.

“If you want to, leave with Huaisang after the hunt is over.”

“There’s no need for that. Huaisang told me everything he knows about the blade tomb.”

“Is his big brother fine with him spilling sect secrets like that?” Jiang Cheng frowns.

“Well..Huaisang already told his brother he knows and that he wants me to fix it.”

“Then we can go to Unclean Realm afterwards.” Jiang Cheng sets down his cup. “Wen Qing says she wanted to do a few more checkups on Chifeng-zun’s health anyways.”

“Alright, that sounds good.” Wei Wuxian nods. He glances at his brother’s expression. “I can tell there’s something else on your mind.”

“Xue Yang.”

“What about him?” Wei Wuxian tilts his head.

“Didn’t we agree that we had to find him? We can’t let him find Xiao Xingchen again and create that tragedy that happened in Yi City. Even if it’s not supposed to happen until years later.”

“I don’t know how we will be able to find him. He could be hiding anywhere.”

“He’s an escaped convict. When he first escaped, Chifeng-zun made sure his disciples knew his description and passed on the details to the other sects including other sects. Considering the award offered for his arrest, I think even the non-cultivators would want to get involved, even if it’s not physically.”

“Xue Yang was able to disguise himself as Xiao Xingchen. Who knows how many years he had that disguise on. Do you not suspect he could be hidden in Carp Tower?”

“You seem to trust Jin Guangyao enough that he wouldn’t let Xue Yang in again,” Jiang Cheng says disgruntledly.

“Jin Guangyao only sought to keep him alive so Jin Guangshan would use him to try and remake the amulet. Before Jin Guangshan’s house arrest, Jin Guangyao did tell me about his father’s persistence of trying to get him to get the amulet from me. But while I was with Jin Guangyao, he never asked for the amulet nor did I reveal any information that he would be able to pass on to his father.”

“He does know you plan to destroy it though,” Jiang Cheng says.

“Everyone knows,” Wei Wuxian replies. “There are both bad and good things about revealing the intentions so openly to the sects.” He hums thoughtfully before going on.

“If anyone tries to come after the amulet on the day I destroy it, we’ll be well prepared. We both know that’s the only time they may try coming after it. We can expose them once and for all.”

“You’re suggesting to use the event as bait?” Jiang Cheng does not sound happy.

“Well...”

“Wei Wuxian!”

“It’s fine if we’re well prepared. Now, why don’t we go find Shijie and Wen Qing? They must be done with breakfast now too.” He stands up and Jiang Cheng *glares* at him with that familiar anger in his expression, the anger Wei Wuxian knows he hides his worry behind.

“Come on. Stop thinking about such things.” he throws an arm around his brother. Why don’t we think about Shijie’s wedding?”

“Again, it’s months away and LanLing Jin is in charge of the preparations.” Jiang Cheng wiggles out of his grasp and opens the door, Wei Wuxian following suit. As soon as he steps foot outside the room, he’s nearly *tackled* by something round and orange.

“Oi! Get off!” Wei Wuxian yelps. Jiang Cheng who had successfully stepped out of the way in time only rolls his eyes at him, staring at him with an unimpressed expression with his arms crossed. Wen Ning, meanwhile, looks rather flustered.

“Little Wonton, it’s not polite to tackle people. How long have you been here?”

“Little Wonton?” Jiang Cheng sputters. “And you think *I’m* bad with names.”

“He looks like one!” Wei Wuxian exclaims. “It’s better than you calling him Xiao Zhu.”

“I never said anything about naming him! What nonsense are you babbling about?” Jiang Cheng mutters.

“Sect leader Jiang, my sister and Young Maiden Jiang are waiting for you,” Wen Ning says in a timid voice.

“Qing-jie too?” Wei Wuxian sneaks a peek at his brother whose ears have turned a noticeable shade of pink. “Jiang Cheng! Did you finally attempt the impossible? Did you?”

“Shut *up*! It wasn’t impossible! I gave her the comb so long ago!” Jiang Cheng retorts.

“Did you keep her waiting for that long? Aiya, Jiang Cheng-,”

“Have a good day and don’t cause any havoc!” Jiang Cheng’s already turning away and storming down the hallway, leaving them both standing there.

“Wen Ning, how was the hunt yesterday?” Wei Wuxian asks. He feels like he hasn’t spoken to his friend in ages. “No trouble, I hope?”

“No, Young Master Wei. No trouble at all. There were some Jin disciples leering in our direction but they didn’t dare try anything with the Nie disciples nearby.” Wen Ning shuffles his feet. “A-jie doesn’t like it here. She only wanted to make sure I was safe.”

“She trusts Jiang Cheng enough,” Wei Wuxian says. “But I understand her concerns. The sooner we leave this place the better.” Wei Wuxian places a hand on Wen Ning’s shoulder. “Why don’t we go and find Huaisang? I’ve been meaning to ask if he knows more about Wonton.”

“The name is creative. I like it,” Wen Ning says shyly.

“I’m glad someone appreciates it!”

“Wei-xiong! Wen-xiong!” someone calls out to him as they walk towards the main courtyard.

“Ah Nie-xiong. You’re right on time.” Wei Wuxian unwraps himself from Wen Ning and walks over to Huaisang. “Do you happen to have any books on hunduns?”

“Not on me,” Huaisang replies. “But I can send you a few once I get back to Qinghe. Listen erhm.. Wei-xiong, I need to speak with you in private. It’s a rather urgent matter.”

“Sure.” Wei Wuxian glances uncertainly at Wen Ning. “Are you sure you’ll be okay?”

“How about we leave him with MianMian and Qin Su?” Huaisang beckons the two ladies over before Wei Wuxian can reply. Once Wen Ning is with them, Wei Wuxian follows Huaisang to this room.

“Wei-xiong, I know you want to destroy the amulet, but can I ask you to help with Da-ge first? You know...with the blades.”

“Of course, Nie-xiong. I did promise you, didn’t I? Once I get the amulet, we will be going to Unclean Realm.

“Eh? So soon?”

“Well..yes. I have everything ready, Huaisang. Do not worry.” Wei Wuxian quietly explains his plan to Huaisang who nods and listens to every word.

“Why don’t you come with me to Lotus Pier first actually?” Wei Wuxian adds. “The sworn brotherhood ceremony. I’d like to get it down before Shijie’s wedding as well.

“Sure!”

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Wei Wuxian can’t get out of Carp Tower soon enough. He had asked Jin Guangyao if he wanted to come watch the ceremony, but the other man had politely refused, choosing to stay here and help Jin Zixuan with the sect. This is one of the many changes Wei Wuxian has noticed in him.

Upon their arrival at Lotus Pier, A-Yuan and the other children greet them with delight.

“New gege!” A-Yuan says, pointing excitedly at Huaisang who waves at him with his fan.

“A-Yuan, do not point,” Wen Qing says sternly. “It is rude. Now do you know how to greet Young Master Nie?”

A-Yuan puts a fist against his other hand and bows politely. “A-Yuan greets you, YOUNG Master Nie.”

“Who taught him that?” Wei Wuxian asks, impressed.

“Who do you think?” Jiang Cheng huffs at his side.

“Purple-gege!” Abandoning all courtesy, A-Yuan wraps himself around Jiang Cheng’s ankles. Jiang Cheng picks him up and passes him to Wen Qing.

“It seems A-Yuan has gotten quite attached to you,” Wei Wuxian comments.

“All the children did.” Jiang Cheng ducks his head slightly, then looks up with a scowl. “Because *you* left me with babysitting duties.”

“I didn’t *ask* you to!” Wei Wuxian protests “Besides, why is it a bad thing? Isn’t it a good thing that they like you?”

“You’ve always been better with kids than me. So I don’t know-,”

“If they like you, they like you. There doesn’t have to be a reason behind it,” Wen Qing interrupts, placing a hand on Jiang Cheng’s arms. “And if there is, it has to be a good one.”

“I guess Jiang Cheng isn’t that scary when he’s around kids. He’s got a soft side!” Wei Wuxian teases and narrowly dodges a smack in the forehead.

“I’ll show you my *non* -soft side!” Wei Wuxian runs away as soon as he hears this with Wonton flying right behind him. He receives the amulet from its safe vault, securing it in a spirit-trapping pouch instead of a qiankun pouch, and seals it with his blood.

“We should bring some disciples along,” Jiang Cheng says as Wei Wuxian approaches him.

“Is it really necessary?”

“We’re carrying precious cargo.” Jiang Cheng scowls. “Do you really want to take that risk?”

Their mission to cleanse the saber tomb is, of course, a secret between Jiang Cheng, Wei Wuxian, Huaisang, and Nie Mingjue. Nobody else knows that the amulet has been taken out of its safe. But Jiang Cheng is right, Wei Wuxian thinks. It is not worth it to take the risk.

“We don’t need too many. The disciples are needed here to protect Lotus Pier. In case anything happens.”

“You think I don’t know that? Who’s the sect leader here?” Jiang Cheng retorts. “Anyways, you’re riding on your hundun. Wen Qing is riding with me.”

“Qing-jie is coming?”

“Of course I’m coming!” Wen Qing retorts. “I’m your doctor.”

“Both of you are so feisty. Truly a match made in heaven,” Wei Wuxian snickers. Both of them give him identical glares and turn away from him.

“Wei-xiong, if you keep teasing them like that, I’m going to start fearing for your life,” Huaisang says, nudging him with his elbow. They follow their brothers and their disciples after saying their farewells. It breaks Wei Wuxian’s heart to leave A-Yuan behind again, but he promises the young boy he’d back soon.

“What do I have to fear?” Wei Wuxian says. “The two of them will manage Lotus Pier well. And eventually, I’ll be moving back to Cloud Recesses.”

“Having Yanli-jie and Wen Qing as your sisters will be quite interesting. Two ends of the spectrum, I say.”

“I wouldn’t say that they’re *that* different,” Wei Wuxian protests. It’s true that Wen Qing can be loud, harsh and cold, but when it comes to the people that she loves, she will do anything to protect them. He had witnessed his Shijie being fiercely riled up when he had been insulted by Jin Zixun. It was the first time Wei Wuxian had seen her that upset.

“Are you sure about that? Well..having you as a brother definitely feels different for me.”

“You can’t compare such a thing!” Wei Wuxian exclaims. “Of course we’re different!”

“Huaisang, come here. Ride with me.” Nie Mingjue is already standing Baxia.

“Can I ride with Wei-xiong instead? I want to know how it feels to ride a hundun.”

“I’m not sure about Wonton being able to hold two riders,” Wei Wuxian says. “I’m still getting used to riding him myself. It’s not easy to stay on him if I have nothing to hold on to.”

“Grab the fur then,” Jiang Cheng says briskly. “Or craft yourself a saddle.”

“Did you know hunduns can’t usually fly?” Huaisang says with a gleam in his eye. “Much less hold a human weight. Even *owning* one is unthinkable.”

“Wonton isn’t a pet, he’s my companion. There’s a difference. Besides, he did choose to stay with me.”

“You replaced Lil’ Apple so quickly,” Jiang Cheng mutters. Wei Wuxian gapes at him.

“Of course not! What’s wrong with having more than one companion?”

“Huaisang,” Nie Mingjue says sharply. “We shouldn’t delay much further. Sect leader Jiang and Young Master Wei are busy enough already.”

“It is not a bother to offer my help to anyone, Chifeng-zun.” Wei Wuxian says with a bow. “But I agree with you. We should be on our way.” Wei Wuxian settles himself onto Wonton, using spiritual strings to keep himself secure.

“Hey, did you not tell Lan Wangji about this?” Jiang Cheng looks at him.

“No...I didn’t,” Wei Wuxian admits. “I didn’t want to drag him away from his sect duties again.”

“If anything happens to you, he’s going to blame me!” Jiang Cheng says with a grimace. “You *do* have this control right?”

“Of course I do!”

“You should have told him. Who else is going to play Cleansing in case something happens with the resentful energy? This isn’t just regular resentful energy, it’s been cooped up inside the blades for generations!”

“Huaisang can play,” Wei Wuxian says. “He’s been practicing. He learned from Zewu-jun.” Jiang Cheng doesn’t look convinced.

“I’m telling him. Don’t even argue,” Jiang Cheng cuts him off as he opens his mouth to protest. Wei Wuxian only watches as Jiang Cheng sends off a butterfly message then mounts onto Sandu with Wen Qing. Knowing Lan Zhan, he will probably fly straight to Qinghe within hours.

As they fly, Wei Wuxian can see Wen Qing leaning towards Jiang Cheng’s ears and her mouths moving. Wei Wuxian distracts himself from them by stroking Wonton’s fur who coos softly in delight. They stop at a town to rest and replenish on energy before continuing. It’s nearly dawn of the next day by the time they arrive in Qinghe.

“Lan Wangji replied,” Jiang Cheng tells him the second they land. “He’ll join us in the morning. We need to rest tonight and do what we need to do tomorrow.”

“I’ll show you to your room,” Huaisang says, beckoning him with his hand. “And I assume Wonton is sleeping with you.”

“He can sleep on the floor.”

“I’ll bring some extra blankets then.” Huaisang nods. Wei Wuxian cleans himself up and settles down onto the bed, closing his eyes. Moments later, he wakes up to a heavy weight on his shoulders.

“Get off,” Wei Wuxian hisses. Wonton has abandoned the pile of blankets Huaisang left for him and is snuggling on the bed next to him instead. Wonton whines and pushes him even harder.

“Ugh.” Wei Wuxian shifts to one side to make space for him. Wonton coos happily and stops wiggling a few moments later, indicating he has fallen asleep. Wei Wuxian finds the hundun’s presence strangely comforting in the absence of the space Lan Wangji would usually fill up. He closes his eyes, falling into deep sleep. The next morning when he wakes up, he feels more refreshed than he did in months.

“You ready?” Jiang Cheng asks him once everyone has finished their meal. Having slept through most of the morning, it is now nearly the late afternoon. “Only Chifeng-zun and I are accompanying you there.”

“And Lan Zhan?”

“He hasn’t arrived yet. I assume he’s waiting for us *there*.”

“Jiang Cheng,” Wei Wuxian says hesitantly. “I think it’s better if only Chifeng-zun came inside with me.”

“What? Why?” Jiang Cheng frowns.

“Zidian nor Sandu will have much affect on sabers. Baxia, however can match its power.”

“Jiang-xiong, if you want to use my saber-,” Huaisang begins.

“I think Young Master Wei is correct.” Wei Wuxian turns around to see Nie Mingjue approaching them. “The sabers will be fast but Baxia will be the only weapon that can block their attacks.”

Jiang Cheng looks ready to argue more but he grits his teeth instead, still not looking happy. Wei Wuxian tries to reassure him.

“Jiang Cheng, it’ll be fine. You can even bring Wen Qing with you and wait outside with her.”

“Sect leader Jiang, I will not let Young Master Wei get hurt, you have my word.” Jiang Cheng looks at the older sect leader, his expression finally calming and he nods.

“Wei-xiong, be careful. You too, Da-ge. Come back safely, okay?” Huaisang grips both their sleeves tightly. Wonton, as if sensing something is wrong, presses against Wei Wuxian’s legs. Wei Wuxian leans down to stroke his fur.

“Don’t worry, little furball, I’ll come back.” Wei Wuxian looks at his friend. “Look after him while we’re gone, won’t you?”

“Of course.”

“The idiot won’t die,” Jiang Cheng says bluntly. “We still need to do the sworn brother ceremony.”

“A-sang, he will be your sworn brother. As your da-ge, I will protect him. Because he will be like a brother to me too.” Nie Mingjue reassures his brother. Huaisang nods and as Wei Wuxian leaves the gate, he turns on the horse he rides and waves to Huaisang who’s watching them leave from the top of the wall. They arrive at their destination within three incense of time. They leave the horses in the stables at the nearby town before walking the rest of the way. Wei Wuxian and Nie Mingjue walk closer towards the tomb while Jiang Cheng watches at the gate.

“Wei Wuxian!” Jiang Cheng calls to him and Wei Wuxian looks back once.

“Don’t you dare die! We need to *both* attend A-jie’s wedding!” Wei Wuxian blinks and nods in reply. He understands Jiang Cheng’s words in a way Nie Mingjue doesn’t. He needs to attend Shijie’s wedding because last time he hadn’t been able to. But also, he needs to come out alive to attend the wedding.

“Young Master Wei?”

“I am ready. Let’s go.”

The second Wei Wuxian steps within the tomb, he immediately hears the voices. He inhales sharply but keeps his focus ahead, his eyes fixed on Nie Mingjue’s tall form.

“We’re almost there. It’s just through here.” Nie Mingjue pushes open the stone doors. Wei Wuxian quickly recognizes the inside when he sees the statues all sitting in different positions. The screaming has gotten even louder but Wei Wuxian blocks them out as he lifts Chenqing to his lips. The second he starts playing, the lids of the coffin start to rumble and shake. He sees Nie Mingjue position himself in front of him.

The first saber shoots out at him with terrifying speed. Wei Wuxian hears the loud scraping of metal against metal as Nie Mingjue moves to block the attack. Wei Wuxian plays a sharper tune, concentrating on the resentful energy oozing from the blade. The resentful energy of beasts, it turns out, isn’t much easier to control than that of humans. It’s more aggressive and resistant, its energy reflecting the same untameness and wilderness of a wild beast itself. Still Wei Wuxian continues to coax the energy into the amulet until the saber drops to the floor. The sabers keep coming, sometimes multiple ones coming at the same time. When this happens, Wei Wuxian has to maneuver around the blades while playing his flute while Nie Mingjue blocks as many as he can with a single swing of Baxia.

“Wei Ying!” Wei Wuxian finally hears his fiancée’s voice.

“Do not come near!” Nie Mingjue’s voice booms out as he blocks another saber. The resentful energy has aroused even more with detection of the presence of a new person. Wei Wuxian pushes him more energy into his flute-playing. He barely notices the accompanying sound of a guqin. The blades suddenly freeze in place. Out of the corner of his eye, he sees Lan Wangji standing at the edge of the doorway, his guqin out in front of him. One by one, the blades start to drop to the floor as Wei Wuxian forces all the resentful energy into the amulet. He’s all but leaning against Nie Mingjue when he’s finished. He hastily wipes away the small trickle of blood from the edge of his lips.

“Wei Ying.” Lan Zhan approaches him, the worry written clearly all over his face. Wei Wuxian can see his eyes flittering up and down, scanning his entire body for injuries

“There’s one more...” Wei Wuxian says, his eyes fixing on Baxia. “If...Chifeng-zun will let me.” Nie Mingjue follows his gaze to Baxia.

“Wei Wuxian, this blade...it’s...it will not be easy,” Nie Mingjue rumbles softly.

“It needs to be done,” Wei Wuxian insists. Nie Mingjue stares at him for a while longer before he nods.

“You should step back more. I..I’m afraid I might not be able to control Baxia. Lan Zhan steps forward as if he’s getting ready to shield Wei Wuxian from any possible attack.

“Lan Zhan, don’t.” Wei Wuxian nudges him backwards. He will not be able to forgive himself if Lan Zhan got impaled by Baxia protecting him. Seeing his Shijie get stabbed in his place was already worse enough.

Wei Wuxian starts playing. At first nothing happens, but then Baxia starts shaking. Nie Mingjue uses both his hands to hold it as firmly as he can in place. Lan Zhan looks at it before throwing out several dozen talismans as well as the same spiritual string that Wei Wuxian uses. The longer Wei Wuxian plays, the more the blade shakes. Something happens to the blade that didn’t happen before; the wisps of resentful energy start rising into the air, surrounding all three of them. Wei Wuxian’s breath shakes slightly when he realizes what’s happening.

“Lan Zhan, the resentful energy.” He hisses through his lips. Lan Zhan is already playing his guqin, dissipating the energy within seconds. Wei Wuxian continues to play, the notes getting sharper and more aggressive. The talismans on Baxia suddenly breaks free and the blade itself rips out of Nie Mingjue’s grip.

“Wei Ying!”

Wei Wuxian jumps back and tip of Baxia misses him by a mere inch. The blade is faster than he imagined and dodging it is not easy.

“Wei Wuxian!”

Jiang Cheng? He’s supposed to stay outside! Wei Wuxian thinks. If the blades attack him, how will I stop them in time?

“Wei Ying!!” Lan Zhan screams his name again when Wei Wuxian finds himself cornered. He flinches, closing his eyes, waiting for the explosion of pain through his chest, but instead he sees a flash of purple light. When he opens his eyes again, he sees the sparkling purple whip of Zidian wrapped around Baxia.

“Hurry up!” Jiang Cheng snaps at him. There’s anger in his eyes along with a terror Wei Wuxian has never seen before in his eyes. Nie Mingjue and Lan Wangji are all but holding into Jiang Cheng’s waist. Wei Wuxian lifts Chenqing back to his lips, music filling the tomb again. The last few wisps of black die down and Baxia’s power soon weakens enough that Jiang Cheng and the others’ combined efforts force onto the ground. The blade soon stops shaking altogether and Wei Wuxian finally lets his legs give out from under him, sinking to the floor.

“Wei Ying.” In an instant, there’s hands supporting him upwards. His surroundings are still spinning around him as Wei Wuxian stands.

“Let’s get him to Wen Qing.” Jiang Cheng’s rough voice comes from his other side. *When did Jiang Cheng get there?*

Nie Mingjue has placed Baxia back into its sheath and comes to help him walk as well. As they leave the tomb, Wen Qing is already walking towards them, her lips pursed unhappily as she immediately checks Wei Wuxian all over.

“Qing-jie-,” Wei Wuxian begins but he’s silenced as she shoots him an icy glare.

“You exhausted your spiritual energy to its brink. Did you forget that you have to take care of a core now?” She snaps. Wei Wuxian is too tired to argue with her.

“We should rest in the nearest inn,” Wen Qing says. “I don’t think we should travel that far.”

“The walk to town isn’t far. Let’s go.” Lan Wangji keeps carrying Wei Wuxian bridal style all the way into the town. Even though he’s exhausted, he can still see some of the townspeople staring in their direction. Normally, Wei Wuxian knows Jiang Cheng will be complaining too, but right now he’s unusually quiet. Once in a while, he catches sight of his brother sneaking glimpses at him.

Once they get to the horses, Lan Wangji carefully passes Wei Wuxian to Nie Mingjue who helps him sit up on the horse first before getting on himself. It feels a little strange to be sitting his close to the Red Blade Master, but the older man doesn’t even shift as Wei Wuxian ends up leaning against him on the ride towards Unclean Realm. He ends up falling asleep but when he hears the alarmed shouts, he immediately sits up. Nie Mingjue gets off the horse as carefully as possible and steps forward to meet several Nie disciples who look panicked.

“What’s wrong? Did something happen to Unclean Realm?” Nie Mingjue demands.

“N-No...we just got an emergency message from Young Master Jin.”

“What is it?” Jiang Cheng says sharply. “Spit it out!”

“The criminals...they’re gone. There was an breakout at the house they were being kept in!”
“Jin Guangshan escaped?” Wei Wuxian moves to shift off the horse. Bad idea, he realizes as he nearly falls onto his face if not for Lan Zhan’s swift reflexes to catch him.

“Gather disciples to send to LanLing immediately,” Nie Mingjue orders.

“Huaisang already started doing that after he heard the news.” Wei Wuxian exchanges a surprised look with his brother who merely shrugs in response. Nie Mingjue casts an apologetic glance towards Wei Wuxian.

“Young Master Wei, I apologize. I did not get to thank you earlier for your help.” Wei Wuxian stares in shock when the older man bows to him.

“Chifeng-zun, there’s really no need!” Wei Wuxian protests.

“No...I must apologize for not being able to accompany you back to Unclean Realm. But as this is an emergency..”

“I understand,” Wei Wuxian says swiftly. “Jin Guangshan must be found. And I assume Jin Zixun is gone too.”

“Yes,” The Nie disciple who had given the news says with a nervous nod.

“Take the horses. We’re close enough to get back on foot.”

“Wei Ying.” Lan Zhan’s grip on him tightens.

“Lan Zhan, you should help find him as well.” Wei Wuxian looks at him.

“No.” The other man says firmly. “I will escort you back to Unclean Realm.”

“The horses,” Nie Mingjue begins.

“I’m fine to walk. Really.” Wei Wuxian insists. Wen Qing and Jiang Cheng both send him glares again but they say nothing.

“You may take the horses, Chifeng-zun,” Jiang Cheng tells the man and he finally gives in with a firm nod, mounting the horse and rides off into the night.

“Let’s go.” Wei Wuxian feels Jiang Cheng moving to his side. After riding the horse for so long, he no longer feels the dizziness from earlier and walks as steadily as possible. Soon, Wei Wuxian can see the dim balls of light of the lanterns coming from the guard towers on top of the Unclean Realm wall in the far away distance. Something shifts, a shadow out of the corner of Wei Wuxian’s eyes. He turns his head towards it.

It happens too fast; he’s still exhausted from controlling the sabers to notice the shape coming towards him. Something slams into him, throwing him back with full force. He hears shouts of alarms, his brother and Lan Zhan screaming his name before he feels his body colliding with something solid, most likely a tree. Pain explodes through him and he feels blood

rushing up his throat and spilling down his chin. Through the blurred out pain, he makes out the shape of a figure. The face almost seems familiar yet...it is different at the same time.

Jin Zixun?

Chapter End Notes

So yeah...that's a cliffhanger. I debated for a long-time on whether or not to keep this cliffhanger, but in the end, I did decide to keep it.

What do you think happened to Jin Zixun?? And also, what are your thoughts on Jin Guangyao now?

Chapter 27

Jiang Cheng doesn't see what has happened until it's too late.

“*WEI WUXIAN!*” The strangled scream rips from his throat as he sees something throw his brother into the trees followed by a cry of pain as he disappears into the shadows.

“Wei Ying!” Lan Wangji's own panicked voice joins his.

His disciples immediately draw their swords and Jiang Cheng glimpses more figures jumping down from the trees. Jiang Cheng has Sandu out in front of him, torn between staying to protect Wen Qing and going after his brother. A flash of white moves in front of him.

“Find Wei Ying.”

Jiang Cheng doesn't even reply and whirls around with his sword out, immediately heading in the direction where his brother had disappeared. He sees the shape of a fierce corpse and reflexively launches Zidian towards it, slamming it away from the prone figure of his brother. The fierce corpse, to his surprise, turns towards him and *flees*, forcing him to retract Zidian at once. He doesn't chase after it, not when he sees that his brother is slumped against the base of the tree, unconscious and with blood at the side of his mouth. He crouches down next to him, his hands immediately shifting towards Wei Wuxian's wrist. The pulse is steady but his breathing is labored. Jiang Cheng checks him over for injuries, including possible trauma near his head. Luckily he finds only a few bruises and nothing more severe. He's starting to send his brother spiritual energy when disciples run over.

“Sect leader! We heard a flute controlling that fierce corpse!”

“A flute?” Jiang Cheng shifts his gaze up to his disciples but doesn't stop the transfer of energy. “Did you see who it was?”

“No...his face was covered. He also had a sword though..”

“Describe it to me,” Jiang Cheng orders. He steps back to allow his healers to check Wei Wuxian himself.

“The sheathe disguised and the man wore a mask.”

Could it be Xue Yang... Jiang Cheng thinks. There's only one demonic cultivator who could be so close to Lanling. Su She hadn't been seen anywhere. In fact, he hadn't even shown up at the hunt.

“Wei Ying!” Jiang Cheng barely has time to register Lan Wangji's arrival when there's a flash of white robes next to him. He copies Jiang Cheng's actions in passing Wei Wuxian spiritual energy.

“It was Xue Yang?” Jiang Cheng asks.

“I saw his sword. It was him.”

“Do you think he helped Jin Guangshan escape? And Jin Zixun...it could only be Xue Yang who used the yin iron to turn him into a fierce corpse.”

But when did Jin Zixun die...is the real question.

“Jiang Cheng...” Wei Wuxian is stirring, at last, his eyes fluttering open. Jiang Cheng and Lan Wangji help him to his feet, supporting him with their arms as he’s still swaying dangerously. Wen Qing swiftly sweeps through the crowd of disciples and starts doing a brief examination of his condition.

“Did you happen to see any curse marks on him?”

“No...I couldn’t tell.” Wei Wuxian grimaces. “We only just got the news about Jin Guangshan’s escape. How can Jin Zixun be a *fierce corpse* ? Unless...”

“You think his death was kept from the other sects,” Jiang Cheng finishes for him. Jiang Cheng’s initial assumption of the murderer is Su She, who had cast the curse on Jin Zixun last time, but he quickly eliminates the possibility. As far as he knows, the two of them hadn’t interacted. Of course, this doesn’t mean it is entirely impossible.

“We should have known better than to trust the *Jin* sect to guard the two of them.” Jiang Cheng bites his lip in frustration. Of course, even if he *did* object to it, it wasn’t in his right or the right of the other sects to try and dictate the imprisonment of the Jin sect’s own sect leader. Madame Jin had declared that Jin Guangshan’s punishment is the Jin sect’s own private internal affairs. The only thing the other sects had really managed to do was remove Jin Guangshan’s punishment remove his place as the chief cultivator.

“Wei-xiong! Jiang-xiong!” Huaisang is running towards them followed by a few dozen disciples.

“We saw the signal flare, are you okay?” Huaisang’s eyes are wide when he takes in Wei Wuxian’s state.

“I’m alright, don’t worry.” Wei Wuxian gives him a weak smile. Jiang Cheng and Huaisang move as one to support Wei Wuxian with Lan Wangji trailing anxiously behind them.

They finally get him back inside his room and lay him onto the bed to allow Wen Qing to give him a more thorough examination. Wonton tries to crawl up next to his master, but Jiang Cheng nudges him off.

“Not now,” He says sternly. “He’s hurt.” The hundun makes a noise that Jiang Cheng assumes is a whine, but it sits back down at the base of the bed.

“I think he’s worried.” Wen Ning bends down to stroke the hundun’s head. “He’s been whining like that for a very long time. Almost as if he senses that Wei Wuxian was in danger.”

"I'm fine," Wei Wuxian insists. He tries to get up but he immediately freezes when Jiang Cheng, Wen Qing and even Huaisang give him identical glares.

"Sect leader Jiang," Huaisang addresses him formally. "Come to the main hall. I must speak with you and Lan Wangji." The younger twin jade reluctantly leaves Wei Wuxian's side and follows Jiang Cheng out.

"Tell me what happened." Huaisang's voice shifts into one of serious tone. With Nie Mingjue gone, Jiang Cheng knows he's been put in charge.

"You send word out that Jin Guangshan and Jin Zixun escaped. Do you know yet who has done it?"

"No." Huaisang shakes his head. "And it was Jin Guangyao who told me." Lan Wangji narrows his eyes.

"Do you suspect him?" Jiang Cheng asks carefully.

"No. Surprisingly, I do not." Huaisang fans himself rapidly.

"Why?" It's Lan Wangji's turn to ask the question.

"With Madame Jin in charge, Meng Yao wouldn't dare do anything with so many of her supporters keeping an eye on him. She even sent for disciples from Meishan Yu to keep an eye on him. If you ask Wei-xiong, he will defend him as well."

"We can't let our guard down completely. Not yet at least."

"I agree." Lan Wangji exchanges a brief glance with him. The Twin Jade's agreement with him no longer surprises Jiang Cheng at this point.

"I have enough spies within Carp Tower as well," Nie Huaisang says calmly. "We all expected Jin Guangyao may have had ulterior motives when he allowed Wei-xiong to be his friend. But we also know that Wei-xiong has been sincere to him. It may surprise you, but he never actually physically tried to hurt Er-ge." Lan Wangji narrows his eyes at the mention of Jin Guangyao's relationship to his brother.

"How can you believe that?"

"I may have hated Jin Guangyao, but I trust Er-ge's words." Huaisang closes his fan with a resigned sigh. "He did eventually come to talk to me...after what happened in Guanyin Temple. He had a lot of faith in Jin Guangyao. I did as well. The amount of betrayal we felt hurt so much."

"Wei Wuxian did a good job turning his loyalty away from Jin Guangshan," Jiang Cheng says at last. "I trust that he was able to change Jin Guangyao for the better. We just need to see the results with our own eyes."

The next day, Wen Qing is quick to clear Wei Wuxian safe to travel. Surprisingly, Nie Huaisang actually accompanies them back to Lotus Pier. He had left Nie Zonghui in charge.

“We might as well do the sworn brothers ceremony today. Though...I would have liked to wait for Da-ge. I’ve let him know we’re at Lotus Pier but I assume he’s still busy looking for the two prisoners.”

“We can still wait...” Wei Wuxian says. “But I feel like the delay has dragged on long enough.”

“I didn’t catch the two Jin bastards but I did catch another degenerate. One we’ve been waiting to get our hands on for a long time.” Everyone turns at the voice that booms across the clearing. Nie Mingjue stands there with two other familiar men. They watch as he throws another man in front of them, restrained with strong rope.

“Song-daozhang, Xiao Xingchen-daozhang. We meet again.” Jiang Cheng steps forward to greet them with respectful bows.

“Xiao-shishu!” Jiang Cheng doesn’t miss the eagerness in his brother’s voice. “Song-daozhang.”

“Is that...” Huaisang begins.

“Xue Yang.” Zidian crackles at his wrist. When he speaks, the man tied up at their feet looks up with a crazed look in his eyes.

“You called me?”

Nie Mingjue gives him a sharp kick.

“Be silence, you scoundrel. Sect leader Jiang, is there a place in the dungeons for him?”

“Of course,” Jiang Cheng replies. He casts a glance towards Wei Wuxian. “Be sure to add some extra reinforcements.”

“I’ll do that.” Wei Wuxian nods. “We should seal his core too.”

“Already did that,” Nie Mingjue tells him. Jiang Cheng escorts them to the dungeons and watches as Wei Wuxian secures the cell with a powerful seal. He even casts one on the bars of the cell, the window, and the entirety of the dungeon itself. After leaving a reasonable amount of disciples to guard the cells, they finally head back into the main hall.

“Now what were you saying about the sworn brothers ceremony, A-Sang?”

“We can do it now in Lotus Pier if Jiang-xiong is fine with it.”

“We should prepare first. We’ll hold it at late noon.” Jiang Cheng turns to Song Lan and Xiao Xingchen.

“Would you like to stay in Lotus Pier for the night? We’d be honored to have you as our guests.” The two men exchange looks.

“We thank you for your offer, Sect leader Jiang.” Song Lan replies with a bow after few more moments. “But we should be on our way.” Jiang Cheng sees a look of disappointment pass Wei Wuxian’s face. It seems he had wanted his mother’s martial brother to stay and see the ceremony.

“It’s almost nightfall. Why don’t you rest here for one night?” Yanli urges. “You’ve traveled so far. “And.” She glances at Wei Wuxian. “A-Xian has wanted to ask you questions about his mother.”

“He has?” Xiao Xingchen glances over at Wei Wuxian who scratches his nose before putting his hands together in a bow.

“I have. I meant to ask more last time but did not get the chance to.”

“Well, in that case.” Xiao Xingchen glances at his cultivation partner. “Zichen, why don’t we accept Sect leader Jiang’s offer?”

“Alright.”

The disciples and servants begin moving along to prepare for the ceremony, preparing food and decorations. The two rogue cultivators only watch in curiosity at the side.

Once everyone is ready, the ceremony soon takes place, with the tablets of both of Wei Wuxian’s parents as well as Jiang Cheng’s as witnesses. Wen Qing, Wen Ning and Nie Mingjue stand at a respectable distance. Xiao Xingchen and Song Lan stand the furthest away but not so far away so that they can’t see what is happening.

Wei Wuxian can’t help but feel nervous as he kneels down in front of Madame Yu’s and Uncle Jiang’s tablets. The number of times he had had to kneel here in his lifetime had come from the result of punishment. He can almost feel her disapproval of this sworn siblingship ceremony.

“Keep your shoulders up.” Jiang Cheng nudges him in the elbow. “Stop thinking about things and focus.” His voice is stern but there’s no bite to his words. Turning his head, he sees a glimpse of fierce determination in Jiang Cheng’s eyes and on his right, his sister gives him an encouraging squeeze on the shoulders. Wei Wuxian takes a deep breath. The ceremony passes by in a breeze. Afterwards, a small feast is held.

“Qing-jie! Let me have it just this once! There can’t be a celebration without wine!” Wei Wuxian whines. Wen Qing purses her lips at him and shoves the wine jar back into his chest.

“Fine, do what you want.”

“Really?” Wei Wuxian stares at the jar of wine as if it’s a piece of gold.

“Your health has improved in the past few months and even your core has made considerable process. Your little”

“A-Xian, that’s wonderful!” Jiang Yanli smiles brightly at this.

“I should give Lan Zhan the credit for that.” Wei Wuxian’s face flushes red.

“No, it was all Wei Ying.”

“ *Lan Zhan* !”

In that moment, Jiang Cheng has a feeling that his brother’s improvement of cultivation did not solely come from hours of meditation in the Cold Pond.

“Lan Wangji! What did I tell you about controlling yourself with my brother before your official engagement!?”

“Aiya, Jiang Cheng!”

“Don’t you ‘aiya Jiang Cheng’ me! It’s improper!”

“You’ve told us that enough times, Jiang Cheng!”

“Well, now that you’re *officially* courting, you have to follow the proper etiquettes. Lan Wangji, I’m sure your brother told you the same thing.” Lan Wangji stares at him for a while longer and Jiang Cheng half-expects him to ignore him again but to his surprise, he simply nods.

“Of course, Sect leader Jiang.”

Wei Wuxian and Huaisang gape at the scene before leaning to whisper into each other’s ears.

“Did they just agree with one another?”

“I guess Lan Wangji had to cooperate with Jiang-xiong because he wanted to marry you.”

“It’s not just that, A-Xian. Remember they care about you too,” Yanli cuts in. “As do A-Sang and I. Oh and A-Xuan too.”

“Jin Zixuan?” Jiang Cheng watches his brother’s face morph from shock to disgust. “The peacock? *Caring* for me?” He visibly shudders.

“A-Xian,” Yanli reprimands. “He is to be my husband soon as Lan Wangji will be yours. We will all be family. ” She turns towards the younger twin Jade. “May I call you ‘Wangji’? You may call me ‘A-jie’ in return.” Jiang Cheng sits up, surprised and Wei Wuxian does the same.

“Yes, you may.” Lan Wangji’s ear turn slightly pink.

“A-Xian, isn’t it time you started calling me ‘A-jie’ too?”

“I…” Wei Wuxian’s voice trails away and he’s silent until Huaisang nudges him in the elbows.

“We’re all sworn siblings now, what are you waiting for? Even I call her ‘Yanli-jie’!”

“It’s not like I don’t *want* to. It’s just...gonna be new.”

“It’s up to you, A-Xian.”

Everyone seems to hold their breath and wait in anticipation. Jiang Cheng watches, feeling just as anxious as everyone else in the room. In a way, he had been waiting for this moment too, ever since he had started publicly acknowledging Wei Wuxian as his brother and right hand man.

“Jiejie, let’s drink another cup then.” Wei Wuxian smiles. Everyone raises their cup along Jiang Yanli before drinking it dry. The celebration continues on with laughter, the clinking of cups, and the exciting squeals of A-Yuan and A-Yu in the courtyard. When all the food has been finished, Jiang Cheng watches from the window of the main hall as his brother walk along the piers with Xiao Xingchen by his side, Song Lan following close behind them. He feels Wen Qing’s presence at his side not too after.

“He’s always wanted to learn about his parents, hasn’t he?” Wen Qing asks quietly. “I doubt Lan Qiren has told him anything”

“I doubt he’s even asked,” Jiang Cheng replies.

“If he accepts Wei Wuxian as his nephew in-law, then maybe it won’t be so bad.”

“Everyone is going to starting new families soon. Has my brother told you about adopting A-Yuan?”

“He has not.” Wen Qing sounds surprised. “I’m sure my family will not mind...but I assumed you wanted to raise him as a Jiang.”

“He’s both,” Jiang Cheng says firmly. “He will be as much a Jiang as he is a Lan. Just like Wei Wuxian will always be a Jiang.”

“I agreed to be your sect lady,” Wen Qing says. Jiang Cheng blinks at her. “But to be a Jiang...”

“You do not have to give up your surname,” Jiang Cheng tells her. “You and your family should keep it to remind the world that not every Wen is evil.”

“Then...our future children will be Jiang?” Jiang Cheng turns, startled at the unexpected question but Wen Qing is staring out over the ponds.

“There are many orphaned children without families. Will they be allowed to have the surname of ‘Jiang’? Or if...” She turns to look at him and Jiang Cheng meets her eye. “The future still has uncertainties,” She says at last. “We should focus on the present.”

“Then...shall we walk around as well?” He holds out his hand and she takes it as they make their way outside. The evenings around this time of the year were never too cold or too warm.

Even if it's just for this one evening, Jiang Cheng allows himself to let go of his worries and relax.

Chapter 28

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Nie-xiong, do you think Jin Zixun was already a fierce corpse when he escaped?” Wei Wuxian asks him. Huaisang frowns and sits up from where he’d been sprawled out across the floor. Nie Mingjue had returned to Unclean Realm and Jiang Cheng is currently in the dungeons interrogating Xue Yang for answers.

“It seemed to me he may have escaped much earlier and we just weren’t informed. What do you suspect happened, Wei-xiong?”

“I still think Su She could have cursed him,” Wei Wuxian tells him. “It’s not like Jin Zixun makes any efforts to try and gather friends. He most likely died from the curse and then he was turned into a fierce corpse.”

“You think Xue Yang did it then? Helped them escape?”

“Xue Yang confessed everything quite easily.” Jiang Cheng’s voice cuts across the room and Wei Wuxian looks up to see him entering the room. “I didn’t even have to threaten him with Zidian.”

“What did he confess?”

“What you just said and more.” Jiang Cheng has a grim expression on his face. “He helped make Jin Zixun a fierce corpse. It’s not very powerful, but it still has consequences.”

“What else did he say?” Huaisang leans in as Jiang Cheng takes a seat at the desk. “Did he help them escape too?”

“He killed some of the guards first. Before disguising himself as one of them.”

“The same way he disguised him as Xiao Xingchen.” Wei Wuxian understands.

“Yes. There were also still people within the sect that supported Jin Guangshan. They’d colluded secretly to help Jin Guangshan escape.” Jiang Cheng pinches the bridge of the nose with his hands. “The Jin sect isn’t exactly stable at this moment so I was afraid something like that would happen, even if Madame Jin was trying her best to keep everything under control.”

“Even Huaisang’s spies didn’t find them then?” Wei Wuxian mutters. “Were they able to identify who they were?” Jiang Cheng shakes his head while Huaisang lets out a defeated sigh.

“They wore masks to disguise their identity but it’s very likely to be them. Some of the guards had helped them escape too.”

“They must have kept Jin Zixun’s death a secret too then.” Huaisang taps his fan against his hands. “Jin Zixuan and San-ge don’t visit the cell themselves.

“We don’t know that yet.” Jiang Cheng rubs his head in frustration. “Jin Guangyao is doing further investigation by interrogating the guards. Do you have any further thoughts?”

“It’s possible Jin Zixun’s body was snuck out shortly after death and delivered to Xue Yang.” Jiang Cheng and Huaisang raise their eyebrows at him.

“It only makes sense,” He explains further. “There’s no other explanation on how Jin Zixun’s fierce corpse was waiting for us just outside of Qishan no sooner than an after the news of Jin Guangshan’s escape. They must have kept Jin Zixun’s death from us!”

The place where Jin Guangshan and Jin Zixun had been held was just at the border of LanLing and Qinghe. Jin Zixuan only sent his most trusted men to check on the prison once a week. Nobody knew however, if his men had actually went to check the inside of the prison itself.

“There’s one more thing,” Jiang Cheng says, his frustrated expression on his face. “We couldn’t find the yin iron piece on him.” Wei Wuxian freezes.

“That means...”

“Jin Guangshan could have it.” Nie Huaisang concludes.

“That’s...that’s bad.”

“Yeah, no shit.” Jiang Cheng crosses his arms over his chest. “You know what might make it worse? Jin Guangshan might have been cooperative with Xue Yang, especially if he knew that was a way he could gain the power of the yin iron.”

“He let Xue Yang turn his own nephew into a fierce corpse?” Huaisang looks at him in shock.

“I’m not surprised,” Wei Wuxian scoffs. “Jin Guangshan wouldn’t care less who he sacrificed to get power, I doubt he was even that sad over Peacock’s death. Even Madame Jin knew he saw his son as nothing more than a political tool. I’m hoping we can find them *before* I destroy the amulet so I can prevent Xue Yang from wreaking havoc with the fierce corpse.”

“Wei-xiong...if Jin Zixun believes it was you who cursed him, would he not hold a large animosity towards you?” Hearing this, Jiang Cheng looks at him with a frown.

It would be harder to control a fierce corpse who holds resentment towards me. Wei Wuxian thinks. *But with the amulet, it shouldn’t be too hard...right?*

“We should clear things up at the conference meeting. This was supposed to be the meeting where we finally trial Jin Guangshan for all his crimes.” Nie Huaisang snaps over his fan and lets out a low sigh.

“How fitting that they broke him out a few days before,” Jiang Cheng mutters.

“Discussing how to deal with those who broke him out will be easy then.” Wei Wuxian points out. “And I know the perfect way to lure them back out of hiding.”

“The amulet?” Huaisang stares at him with wide eyes.

“You catch on fast, Nie-xiong!”

“Absolutely not,” Jiang Cheng hisses. “Something can go wrong.”

“It can go wrong without someone interfering,” Wei Wuxian retorts then immediately snaps his mouth shut.

“You told me the array would block out any backlash.” The temperature of the room seems to drop. Wei Wuxian takes a deep breath.

“It will...but that’s only for the people *outside* the array. To prevent the witnesses from being hurt.”

“Then what about you, Wei-xiong? Wouldn’t you have to be inside the array?”

“It’ll be fine,” Wei Wuxian says reassuringly. “The energy from the backlash should be absorbed.”

“Into *what* ?” Jiang Cheng demands. “The ground? Don’t tell me you’re planning something crazy again!”

“No No, it’s nothing like that.” Wei Wuxian holds up two fingers. “I wanted to use the energy to power up the arrays at Lotus Pier. So I plan to contain the energy inside of this.” He holds up a black talisman paper. Jiang Cheng glares at him, looking utterly unimpressed.

“Wouldn’t that just mean you have the amulet’s power in a different form?” Huaisang asks in a befuddled voice.

“Not exactly.” Wei Wuxian shakes his head. “It’s energy that’s being stored, not resentful energy. It’s almost like containing energy from a explosion.”

“Wei Wuxian.” Jiang Cheng’s jaws are tight.

“I *know* , A-Cheng. Just trust me, okay? Lan Zhan will be there to help me. He straight-up refused to let me destroy it on my own.” Wei Wuxian sighs. “I don’t like it, but his sect’s knowledge on resentful energy will be useful in this situation.”

“Fine then.” Jiang Cheng still looks unhappy but he gives a curt nod before leaving the room.

~

The following month, the Jiang sect prepare for the discussion conference in Qinghe as well as Xue Yang’s transfer to the dungeons of Unclean Realm. The Lan sect had sent their own disciples to meet them in Caiyi Town so as to provide further guards around Xue Yang and to travel together to Qinghe.

“Lan Zhan, I missed you!”

“Mn. Missed Wei Ying as well.”

Something shoves against his legs, making him stumble forward. Immediately, arms wrap around him, breaking his fall.

“It seems like Wonton wants you two to get married faster.” A Jiang disciple comments.

“I wish I could too, but I can’t. We have yet to pick the wedding date.” Wei Wuxian rolls his eyes. “For now, we have more pressing matters to deal with.” He eyes Xue Yang’s who’s tied up with strong spiritual-energy-suppressing rope and is guarded by at least ten other disciples. The other man catches his eyes and smiles devilishly at him. Wei Wuxian narrows his eyes back at him before looking away. At his side, Lan Zhan has shifted so that he’s blocked him from the delinquent’s line of sight. Even from where he’s standing, he can tell Lan Zhan is glaring daggers at Xue Yang.

“Aiya Lan Zhan, don’t worry. He can’t do anything right now.” Wei Wuxian reaches out to hold his hand.

“Oh, can’t I?” Wei Wuxian glares at the man the same way his fiancée is with the same coldness in them.

“I’d like to see you try.” Jiang Cheng’s voice cuts in. Xue Yang’s smirk only widens, unfazed even in the presence of a sparkling Zidian.

The trip to Qinghe goes surprisingly smooth, without any disruption on the road. Wei Wuxian can tell that Jiang Cheng is on high alert after the last ambush that had happened. Lan Zhan had been just as cautious, never leaving Wei Wuxian’s side for even a second and his head occasionally turning from side to side. He had also noticed the amount of Jiang disciples that had been positioned near him.

“Welcome!” Huaisang is eager to greet them as they arrive.

“Nie-x-, no wait, I should call you Huaisang- *ge* now, shouldn’t I?” Wei Wuxian throws an arm around his friend. Huaisang slimps in his grip.

“Wei-xiong ah, don’t be like that, please. You’re embarrassing me. What do you want me to call *you* ? Ying’er? Or ‘A-Xian’?”

“That sounds...” Wei Wuxian frowns and next to him Lan Wangji gives a huff of disapproval, turning a cold gaze towards Huaisang who shrinks beneath it. Wei Wuxian snickers at the obvious jealousy at the informal term Huaisang had suggested.

“Then maybe I can stick with Wei-xiong...” Huaisang sighs. “Wouldn’t A-Xian be too weird? I’m not *that* much older.”

“Suite yourself.” Wei Wuxian shrugs. The rest of the sect leaders start filing in and Wei Wuxian calmly ignores the glances in his direction. Wonton lays at his feet, rolling around under the table and paying no attention to anyone.

“Young Master Wei.” A familiar voice startles him and he turns to see Jin Guangyao. The man isn’t wearing his usual gold clothes, instead he’s wearing a set of robes similar to the ones Wei Wuxian had seen him wear before he had been forced to leave the Nie sect.

“Jin-xiong?” Wei Wuxian says uncertainly. The other smiles faintly, a genuine smile that Wei Wuxian had rarely seen; almost all the smiles from the past had been fake.

“You may call me ‘Yao-ge’ as I no longer wish to go by that surname.”

“Then...Chifeng-zun forgave you?” Wei Wuxian asks cautiously.

“I...” Meng Yao smiles weakly. “Da-ge is not that much of a forgiving person but I...I begged him for a second chance.”

Begged..

This is very different from the Meng Yao Wei Wuxian knows, or use to know. After all, they’d change so many things.

Once everyone has sat down, Nie Mingjue begins the meeting with a short greeting to everyone before things get serious.

“I’m sure many of you have heard the news about Jin Guangshan’s escape. We have many search parties out still looking for him.”

Murmurs ripple through the hall. Some minor sect leaders even cast suspicious looks at Meng Yao who pays them no mind.

“Xue Yang was controlling Jin Zixun at the time we were attacked near Qinghe,” Nie Mingjue continues. “They must have colluded.”

“Jin Guangshan recruited a demonic cultivator?” Sect leader Yao calls out. “Is that why he was so desperate to try and get Young Master Wei on his side?”

“He wanted power. This should be obvious by now,” Nie Mingjue replies. “Should I list all the countless amount of crimes he and his followers have committed?”

“Please enlight us, Chifeng-zun,” A minor sect leader calls out.

“I can name one.” An unfamiliar voice speaks out and Wei Wuxian cranes his neck to see who it is.

“Sect leader Qin, please speak.”

Qin Su’s father:

Wei Wuxian exchanges a look with Huaisang who simply blinks back at him calmly.

“He violated my wife.” Gasps of horror fill the hall. “And that was how she conceived A-Su.” Next to Huaisang, Meng Yao’s complex pales significantly.

“It took her a lot of courage to finally tell me the truth.” He continues. “I wasn’t sure if I was willing to share it but my wife insisted that the cultivation world should know.”

“To add to that list.” Nie Mingjue’s voice booms across the hall once more. “The murder of many innocent Wen civilians including the elderly, women and even children. Though I am sure you haven’t forgotten this from the last conference meeting we had.”

“No, we have not.” Lan Xichen’s voice is calm, but Wei Wuxian can see the darkening anger in his eyes.

“There’s no need for a trial. His crimes are very clear! He even tried running away. Doesn’t it only prove his guilt?” Wei Wuxian grimaces when he hears Sect leader Yao speak again. However much he’s in glee of the cultivation world turning against Jin Guangshan, he will never be able to fathom the level of annoyance he felt with Sect leader Yao. Jin Zixuan finally stands up from where he’s sitting.

“As acting sect leader, I will not let his crimes go unpunished. I am ashamed to call that man my father.” He unexpectedly turns towards Meng Yao who starts.

“Perhaps, it was good that you left. I do not know how many more of my father’s spies could be hiding in Carp Tower.” Meng Yao looks down, his eyes flickering upwards uncomfortably.

“Even before I left, I felt more comfortable in Unclean Realm. My father only wanted me around when he tried to get me do things.”

“Can we trust him?” An unknown minor sect disciples mutters, loud enough for Wei Wuxian to hear.

“I thought he had Jin Guangyao wrapped around his fingers.”

“Didn’t he have a part in the labor camps?”

“How do we know he didn’t help his father escape...as a son of a prostitute, he must want to do anything to rise to power..”

“I heard he let Xue Yang go..back then..”

Wei Wuxian sees Meng Yao stiffening, his expression growing angry.

Nie Mingjue clears his throat loudly and the hall falls silent once more.

“I can attest that A-Yao is not the culprit,” Jin Zixuan says calmly. “He’d been closely assisting me. Additionally, I did have MianMian staying by his side.” He sounds almost apologetic.

“Don’t worry, Young Master Jin Meng Yao says quietly. “I understood your concerns. It was true that I wanted to gain status. Can you blame me?” He cast a bravely defiant look over the hall of sect leader. “If it weren’t for my friend, I would not have been able to see how that

man would never have appreciated me.” Hearing this, Wei Wuxian turns towards him and their eyes meet briefly.

“A-Yao,” Lan Xichen says, his voice soft. “I am glad.”

“Now that we’ve finalized our action against Jin Guangshan, we have another important matter to discuss: the selection of the chief cultivator.”

“Other than the Jin sect, the Nie sect was the leading sect during the Sunshot Campaign. I think Chifeng-zun should be given the position,” A minor sect leader calls out.

“Zewu-jun has always upheld a strong sense of justice and is very wise. He would be a great chief cultivator, especially as one of the Twin Jades.”

Wei Wuxian immediately distracts himself from the conversation as it continues. After what felt like a shichen, they finally decide for Nie Mingjue to take on the position. Once everyone has given their congratulations, they begin to discuss other sect affairs.

“Xue Yang is to be executed.”

Nobody protests at the new chief cultivator’s decision. Jiang Cheng exchanges a satisfied look with Wei Wuxian.

“There is a concern I must bring up. We’d thought Xue Yang had the yin iron piece, but it seems like he does not. He must have expected to be captured and hidden it elsewhere.”

“Sect leader Jiang, it is good that you’ve mentioned it.” Nie Mingjue says in a rumbling voice. “The guards interrogated Xue Yang about Jin Guangshan’s whereabouts but he refused to speak. I doubt he will reveal the whereabouts of the yin iron piece.”

“It could be in Jin Guangshan’s hands.” Jiang Cheng voice’s is grimm.

“Then it is even more crucial that we find him,” Nie Mingjue says gravely.

“Your excellency,” Wei Wuxian addresses him while standing up. “There is one more matter that needs to be addressed. It is of utmost importance.”

“Speak then.” Nie Mingjue nods.

“I’m sure many of you were still anxious about the stygian tiger amulet,” he begins very carefully. Immediately, he feels everyone’s eyes on him, some of them with expressions of hostility and suspicion.

“Lan Zhan and I have finally figured out how to destroy it properly and we’d like to put your worries at ease by getting rid of it as soon as possible.”

“How soon?” *Sect leader Yao again? Does he ever get tired??*

“By the end of next month.” He feels Jiang Cheng relax next to him. As much as Wei Wuxian had been tempted to destroy the amulet in the following days, he’d promised Jiang Cheng.

“It needs to be destroyed in a place where there are no civilians nearby, preferably somewhere desolate. This is to prevent casualties,” Wei Wuxian continues.

“Then...how about Qionggi Path?” At the mention of that place, Wei Wuxian immediately feels uneasy and judging by Jiang Cheng’s darkening expression, he knows something is off as well. The voice sounds familiar.

Su She? Wei Wuxian’s fingers closes around Chenqing at his waist. Lan Wangji is full on glaring at the minor sect leader while Huaisang stares at him with an eerie calmness, his eyes peeking over his fan like a predator watching its prey. Wei Wuxian maintains his composure.

“The space there is vast, but it is too unprotected. With Jin Guangshan and his men out there, it will be vulnerable to a sneak attack.”

“Then where do you suggest we go, Young Master Wei?”

“The Burial Mounds. The place is full of resentful energy anyways. Why not just send the energy back there? That way, it will not affect the common people and there will be no need for us to cleanse the resentment.”

“Will we be able to go near it?”

“That’s right...the resentment there will affect our cores, wouldn’t it?”

“If there are people who feel uncomfortable going, then you do not have to bother yourself,” Wei Wuxian says, holding back a scoff. “I’m sure witnesses from the three great sects will be enough.”

“That sounds like a fair deal.” Nie Mingjue agrees.

“When the day comes close, I will send a letter out,” Jiang Cheng says, standing. “For now, I have to plan for my sister’s wedding.” He turns towards Jin Zixuan who nods at him. Nie Mingjue then glances at where Xue Yang is being guarded in the corner of the room.

“Now we can end this bastard’s life once and for all.” The guards drag Xue Yang out into the courtyard and the sects follow behind Nie Mingjue at a respectful distance. The man laughs crazily as the Nie guards drag him into the courtyard. Then the executioner swings the blade at his neck and the last of his laugh dies on his tongue as his head rolls onto the ground and red spills all over the courtyard. Finally, the sects disperse.

~

A month later, Wei Wuxian is back at Carp Tower again. Glamour Hall is decorated with red banners and other decorations. He wipes at his eyes when he feels wetness on his cheeks. Last time, he hadn’t been able to attend his sister’s wedding. Last time, he’d had to hear the news from Lan Zhan when he had come to Yiling. Last time she’d only been able to come to show him her wedding dress. Now everything is happening in front of him. He snaps out of his daze as Jiang Cheng gives him a light nudge on the elbow and they go to sit.

“What are you standing around for, idiot?”

“Nothing,” Wei Wuxian huffs. “Are you crying too? This isn’t even the first time for you!”

“Shut up, I’m not crying!” Jiang Cheng hisses back, but there’s an obvious shininess to his eyes. Like him, Wei Wuxian knows Jiang Cheng is only happy that he can see their sister’s wedding again, a union that wouldn’t be short-lived this time. This time, both she and her husband will be able to help raise Jin Ling and he would be able to grow up with many uncles.

“Was it this beautiful last time too?” Wei Wuxian murmurs softly, his eyes fixed on Yanli as she steps into the room with her red wedding hanfu and veil over face.

“It was,” Jiang Cheng whispers back. “But this time…A-jie is even more happy.” Wei Wuxian smiles softly, understanding the unspoken sentiment. The brothers watch as their sister and husband perform their three bows with Madame Jin as witness. After the bows are over and the banquet begins, Wei Wuxian immediately goes to find his soon to-be husband who strides across the room to meet him with a warm expression.

“Their wedding was beautiful. I am glad you were here to see it this time, Wei Ying.”

“Me too.” Wei Wuxian leans into his soft embrace. The rest of the banquet went quite well. Jiang Cheng points out it’s a lot livelier, especially with A-Yuan and Mo Xuanyu there with them. The hundun had not only made things more chaotic, but more fun as well. One of the sons of the minor sect leaders had cautiously approached Wonton with his hands outstretched.

“Don’t be scared. He doesn’t bite,” A-Yuan tells him. Wei Wuxian steps closer to observe the boy and slowly realizes that this is Ouyang Zizhen. He looks so different from his father; he had as a teenager and even more so as a child. The gentle look on the child’s face is a stark contrast from his father’s scowling and hostile expression. Soon Sect leader Ouyang ushers his son back towards his mother, throwing Wei Wuxian a suspicious look whom he calmly ignores. He takes A-Yuan into his arms and starts walking back towards the room they shared.

“Wei Ying.” Wei Wuxian turns.

“Lan Zhan.”

“You should not be walking around Carp Tower by yourself.”

“Aiya, Lan Zhan. You worry too much.”

“Wei Ying.”

“Come with me. Let’s put our son to bed, shall we?” Lan Wangji’s expression softens.

“Mn.”

“Aren’t you going to stay, Lan Zhan?” Wei Wuxian asks once they’ve finished humming a lullaby to put A-Yuan to sleep.

“Xiongzhang will wonder where I am as will Shufu.”

“But Lan Zhan...” Wei Wuxian sticks his lips out in a pout.

“Wei Ying...be patient.”

“Fine..” Wei Wuxian huffs. “But I’m sure you’re less patient than me, *Lan-er gege*. ” He finishes the sentence with a smirk. Lan Wangji’s expression hardens slightly and suddenly Wei Wuxian finds himself being pressed against the wall, with his wrists held tightly.

“Lan Zhan, behave! Not in front of the child!” Lan Wangji doesn’t respond, only presses his lips against his before pulling back.

“Good night, Wei Ying.”

“Good night, Lan Zhan.”

Wei Wuxian curls up onto the bed with A-Yuan. Wonton lightly jumps onto the bed as well, settling down at his feet.

Soon, it will be Lan Zhan and A-Yuan. All together. As things should be.

Chapter End Notes

College has been kicking my ass T_T but here's the new chapter!

Chapter 29

Chapter Notes

First note: the mood to this chapter kinda changes a LOTT. I'm a bit bad with romance scenes so idk if the scene with Wen Qing and Jiang Cheng in this chapter is any good...I hope it wasn't too cringy. Also can someone remind me if I made JC give WQ the comb or not bc I honestly do not remember LMFAO

Second note: I had to add in a part to the last chapter about Xue Yang's execution. I can't believe i forgot about that. Otherwise, there would have been huge plotholes dkfjdf. Pls go back and read that part XD i apologize for the inconvenience.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It's barely been a week and Jiang Cheng already missed his sister's presence. Of course, this is different from the aching hole he had felt in his chest for sixteen years, not only because of his sister's absence, but his brother's as well, as much as he had wanted to refuse to acknowledge his grief for him. Wei Wuxian has yet to make his core strong enough to wield Suibian. Instead he now trains the disciples with spiritual bow and arrows he had invented. The strings of the bow are infused with spiritual energy, its function similar to the Lan sect's chord assassination technique. Jiang Cheng eventually allows him to start leading night-hunts again, but not without making sure each disciple carries more than enough signal flares and instructs all of them to stay on high alert in case they encounter one of Jin Guangshan's supporters. As discussed, all major sects and even several minor sects have all sent out multiple search parties to look for the missing prisoners.

Meanwhile, Jiang Cheng busies himself with exchanging letters with Lan Xichen about the dowry and bride prices. The letters go back and forth quite a few times until they eventually come to an agreement. The Lan sect sends over a generous amount for the bride price along with a variety of gifts that Lan Wangji had chosen himself. They have yet to start proper planning for the wedding banquet, but Jiang Cheng puts aside a large amount of money from the Jin sect's own bride price. After he finishes settling out the financials, he reads the letter Huaisang had sent him.

Jiang-xiong, Meng Yao and I may have found a lead on where Jin Guangshan may be. We figured he'd know it'd be risky staying on any of our own sect's territory. Where do you think would be a perfect hiding spot for him? Nightless City! It's been abandoned and no sect disciples have thought to look there yet. The Xuanwu cave is another hiding spot. The land that got split up among the sects after the war also doesn't include Nightless City. Understandably, Qishan is far away and sending reinforcements would be difficult. But I will speak to Da-ge about it. Tell Wei-xiong and Yanli-jie to be careful, especially Yanli-jie since

she is in LanLing right and could be near enemies. You stay safe as well, Jiang-xiong. I will continue to keep you updated.

Jiang Cheng places the letter back into the envelope and places it inside a small chest before sealing it again. Just as he closes the drawer, he hears alarmed yells out from outside and the running of footsteps. Immediately on alert, he grabs Sandu and opens the door.

“What happened?” Jiang Cheng demands to the first disciple he sees.

“It seems da-shixiong overdid it with his experiments again.” Instead of sounding panicked, the disciple sounds flustered. Jiang Cheng suppresses an exasperated groan and places Sandu back onto his belt. He heads towards the sound of the shouting, which seems to be coming from the pond.

“Wei Wuxian! What did you do this time?” Jiang Cheng yells, irritation in his voice.

“Uhh..” Wei Wuxian emerges from behind a tree. His robes and face are covered in splatters of mud.

“Well?”

“So...the lotuses weren’t growing too well this season and A-Yuan was very sad.” Wei Wuxian begins sheepishly. “So I thought I would try something new..” As he speaks, he waves Chenqing.

“You revived the dead plants?” Jiang Cheng asks flatly.

“Well yes..but it didn’t work out the way I thought it would. It seems like they’ve generated into yaos.” Before Jiang Cheng can reply, he hears the disciples’ loud voices.

“There’s so many of them! How will we catch them all?”

“Use an array! This is good practice!” Wei Wuxian yells back. Jiang Cheng pinches his nose with his fingers, his eyebrows twitching. Next to him, Wonton lies down on its stomach, legs sprawled outwards and Jiang Cheng swears he heard it give an exasperated sigh.

“Something similar happened in the Burial Mounds...except it was the turnip and other vegetables that we grew. You should have seen the look on Lan Zhan’s face!”

“Tell me about it later and clean up your mess first!” There are far many lotus yaos running around for Jiang Cheng to count. Judging by the loud screeching of Lil’ Apple, a few of them must have run into the barn she’s staying in. He gives the courtyard a quick scan; nobody seems to be hurt or distressed other than A-Yuan who’s hiding his face in Wen Qing’s shoulders, wailing uncontrollably.

“Wei Wuxian!” Wen Qing’s voice booms across the courtyard. “You made A-Yuan cry! And what did I say about using resentful energy again? Especially when your core is vulnerable to it!”

“Qing-jie, I *barely* used any. This is nothing!” Wei Wuxian whines back but he snaps his mouth shut when Wen Qing gives a hard look. Even at the distance Jiang Cheng is standing

at, he feel the intensity of her glare.

Jiang Cheng traps a few of the yaos using spiritual binding nets and works together with the disciples to round up the rest. Even Wonton helps to chase the creatures into the nets. Afterwards, Wei Wuxian finally exorcises them with an array and the chaos is over.

“Now can you please shut your donkey up? My ears are going to bleed!” Wei Wuxian runs towards Lil’ Apple where she’s being restrained by a few disciples. Next to them, Wen Ning is trying to soothe her with his calming voice.

“Aya, Lil’ Apple. Calm down, okay? Just eat this. Everything will be fine.” Jiang Cheng watches him pull two apples out of his pocket and offer it to the donkey who immediately stopped screeching and lunges forward to eat them.

“A-Niang! Are the scary lotuses gone?” A-Yuan had run over to Wei Wuxian the second Wen Qing puts him back down.

“*A-Niang*?” Jiang Cheng sputters, exchanging a look with Wen Qing who looks equally bemused. “Does he call Lan Wangji ‘Baba’ now? Or ‘A-Die’?”

“Wei Wuxian must have told A-Yuan to call him that. He’d be that shameless.” Wen Qing replies with a huff.

“I didn’t tell him that, Jiang Cheng! He started doing that by himself, I swear!” Jiang Cheng clicks his tongue and rolls his eyes in response.

“A-Yuan, if Wei Wuxian is ‘A-Niang’, what about me? I can’t be ‘Cheng-gege’ anymore, right?” A-Yuan gives him a slow blink as if he’s trying to register the words.

“Gugu!” A-Yuan says, pointing at Wen Qing and. “Shushu!” For a second, Jiang Cheng stares at the young child with his mouth parted slightly. His moment of shock is interrupted by Wei Wuxian’s loud laughter.

“Jiang Cheng! You’re an uncle! And you’re not even married yet!”

“Says the one who claims he has a son!” Jiang Cheng yells back, trying to ignore the heat that’s rushing up his neck to his face and ears.

“If you need advice on being an uncle.” Wen Qing says calmly. “I’m sure A-Ning will teach you how to look after A-Yuan.”

“Oh...” Jiang Cheng clears his throat nervously. “Well...”

“It’s best to prepare earlier, ChengCheng. We’re going to have so many nieces and nephews!”

“Wei Wuxian!” Jiang Cheng snaps.

“Wei Wuxian! What are you saying?” This time, Wen Qing is the one flushing. Wen Ning looks between the two of them before giving him a warm smile.

“I’ll leave the two of you alone. I should around with the disciples in case the little devils from earlier decided to swim.” Wei Wuxian hurries away quickly before Jiang Cheng can say anything else.

“Jiejie, I promise I’d look after A-Yuan today. I’ll be off.” Wen Ning too walks away, being the closest to running that Jiang Cheng has seen him.

Siblings. Jiang Cheng thinks to himself. He can tell Wen Qing is slightly annoyed too, but offers him a small smile despite the suddenness of the two of them being left alone.

“I was going to go to town to buy some more herbs,” Wen Qing begins slowly. “Would you want to join me?” Jiang Cheng’s heart skips a beat.

“Yes...I was going to go to the tailor’s to-,” He breaks off suddenly. He hadn’t told any in his family about the new robes he’d ordered for Wen Qing. The only person who knows is the maid he’d gotten Wen Qing’s measurements from based on her own robes. If Wen Qing noticed the pause in his words, she shows no reaction to it.

“Shall we go then?”

They walk side by side into town, the disciples following them remaining at a respectful distance. She walks closer than what a regular head healer would, the edge of their elbows brushing against one another; Jiang Cheng didn’t mind. He’s glad to be able to stand by her side like this, something he hadn’t been able to do in the old timeline. She has faith in him in a way she never had. But somehow, Jiang Cheng still feels like he has many things to prove before he can be a good *husband*.

They arrive at the tailor store and Jiang Cheng steps inside to pick up the new robes, which is carefully tucked away in a box that’s been wrapped by cloth. He opens the box and places a clarity bell on top of the robes before reclosing the lid again.

As they travel back, they take the time to look at the stands, selling a variety of items such as hair accessories, makeup rouge, other jewelry, toys, and food. Wen Qing stops to pick up herbs and medicine from the pharmacy and Jiang Cheng drops a small pouch of coins onto the counter before she can reach into her robes. She looks ready to protest but he simply takes her hand and leads her out of the store.

“You seem to be deep in thought. Is there something wrong?” He can feel Wen Qing’s gaze on her. He looks at her then at the surrounding crowds. She glances around as well and nods in understanding.

When they return home, the disciples leave their side to return to their own duties and Jiang Cheng leads Wen Qing to his private room. He places the wrapped box carefully onto the table.

“These robes are for you...I wanted to give them to you for a long time, but I had to wait. For the right time.” Wen Qing looks up at him, curiosity and surprise in her eyes. She opens the box to reveal the neatly folded robes.

“You’ve already asked me to be your sect lady.”

“Yes. Which is why I had the robes prepared immediately.” He feels heat in his ears. “I didn’t want to delay it any longer.” Wen Qing stares at him for a very long time, her eyes a pool of emotion. She takes the robe into her hands and slips behind the dressing screen. Jiang Cheng waits patiently, his eyes gazing out the window at the pool of lotuses.

“Jiang Cheng.”

“A-Qing.” He hadn’t meant to say it, but in that moment, he’d let the affectionate term let slip.

You look beautiful...

She really did look beautiful, the dark shades purple clashing beautifully with the red, some parts of it mixing into shades of magenta. The Jiang clarity bell is attached to her belt,

He takes her hand and pulls her close to add one last accessory, a lotus hairpin, one of his own. He slips it carefully into her hairbun and when he pulls back, he can feel her breath upon her neck. He leans in and her lips part ever so slightly. She pulls him in during his moment of his hesitation and as he sinks into the kiss, he almost doesn’t hear the door banging open. Wen Qing jerks away from him, startled.

“Jiang-, oh!”

“Wei Wuxian! I’ll break your legs!” He yells, his temper flaring up in irritation and embarrassment. This is the *second* time Wei Wuxian had interrupted them, the first time had just been him blatantly spying on them.

“I’m sorry, it was urgent news!” Wei Wuxian holds up his hand in surrender as Wen Qing turns her glare towards him.

“Learn to knock, won’t you? I would rather my nephew not inherit these bad habits!” Jiang Cheng pinches the bridge of his nose in frustration, his face still burning red.

“Qing-jie, it’s something I need your help with. I love your robes. Jiang Cheng gave them to you, didn’t he? It’s about time! I was wondering when you’d start wearing purple after he-,”

“Talk then.” Jiang Cheng can see that she’s flushed as well.

“How much resentful energy can this core of mine handle? I know destroying it will cause most of it to dispel into the air, but since I’ll be using most of the energy against itself, it may end up affecting me the most.”

“That contradicts from what you told me last time.” Jiang Cheng narrows his eyes.

“I’m still using the talisman,” Wei Wuxians says hurriedly. “But there’s no way I can absorb *all* of the amulet’s energy into it. Why do you think I chose the Burial Mounds to be the place to destroy it? Not only is that place already full of resentful energy, no villages are close

enough to it that they may be affected with the explosion. Though...” Wei Wuxian lets out a thoughtful hum. “I was planning to cleanse the Burial Mounds first...”

“Absolutely not!” He and Wen Qing bark simultaneously.

“Was the Nie tomb not enough for you? After the stunt you pulled there, it took me almost an hour to cleanse your core.” Wen Qing says sharply. “You can find other ways to cleanse the Burial Mounds without using the amulet. I’m sure your genius brain can think of an invention. To answer your question, obviously, too much resentful energy will end up tainting the core you worked so hard on, even if Lan Wangji is there to counter its effects. Now you’re planning to add even more resentment to the amulet?”

“Qing-jie, I’m glad you have faith in my ability, but there’s nothing that can hold resentful energy as well as you know...the amulet.”

“You’re talking about cleansing the place, not holding the energy.” Jiang Cheng crosses his arms. “Why would that require the amulet? Doesn’t the Gusu Lan have techniques for Cleansing?”

“Jiang Cheng, the Burial Mounds has *hundreds* of years worth of resentful energy. There’s a reason why none of the sects had been able to cleanse it. ”

That made sense, Jiang Cheng thinks. He cleansed it with the amulet last time.

“You’re not absorbing it into the amulet before you destroy it.” Wen Qing says firmly. It’s already unstable as it is.”

“Ah...it’s not *that* unstable. Lan Zhan helped me stabilize it.”

“It’s unstable by default,” Jiang Cheng says dryly. “Even if it’s refined. But Wen Qing is right. You don’t need to make things more dangerous for yourself.”

“Hmm alright. I promise I wouldn’t worry Shijie so...”

“Good. As long as you know.” Jiang Cheng knocks his fist into his shoulders. “Now the next time you come in, you better knock alright? That includes my bedroom, obviously.” Next to him, Wen Qing’s face turns a shade deeper.:

“Oh, of course.” Wei Wuxian smirks. “But you have to do the same, alright?” He runs out of the room before Jiang Cheng can reply.

“Unlike you, I have more self control!” Jiang Cheng yells after him.

“Wen Ning will knock.” Wen Qing says coolly.

“Of course he would. Wen Ning has good manners,” Jiang Cheng huffs in reply. “Now, we can walk around Lotus Pier.”

~

“You’re sure everything will work out, right?” Jiang Cheng watches as his brother and Lan Wangji crouch on the ground, drawing out the array around them. A few Jiang disciples stand in a line nearby; they’re there not just to prevent any possible attack from hostile disciples, but also prevent anyone from trying to get too close and possibly getting injured. They’re in the center of the Burial Mounds while the other sects are closer to the edge.

“Nothing is foolproof, Jiang Cheng. This array will only minimize the risk. The talisman will do the rest.”

Jiang Cheng lets out a discontented huff before looking over at Lan Wangji.

“You’ll make sure nothing happens to him right?” The other man stares up wordlessly at him. The intensity in those eyes said more than enough to satisfy Jiang Cheng’s question.

“I’d be more worried about the fierce corpses that all the resentment will attract. That’s why I told you to bring more disciples. Earlier, I saw Jin sect didn’t bring many people.” Wei Wuxian comments as he gets to his feet, dusting off his hands and robes.

“Jin Zixuan only brought his most trusted disciples. The ones he *knew* he could trust.” Jiang Cheng tells him.

“MianMian’s friends then?” Wei Wuxian says cheerfully.

“He left MianMian at Carp Tower actually,” Jiang Cheng says. “To protect A-jie.”

“Oh, smart.” Wei Wuxian nods approvingly. “Shijie needs someone like MianMian. At least Peacock had one trusted friend.”

“I’ll keep the other sects at a distance,” Jiang Cheng tells him. When he says this, he’s mainly thinking about the minor sects who might cause trouble. He has nothing to worry about from the Nies or Lans. Nie Mingjue had reassured him that his disciples would be there to protect Wei Wuxian.

“Our disciples will be closest to you, guarding the surrounding area.”

“Alright.” Wei Wuxian nods. “Make sure they aren’t too close alright?” He turns to the man in white next to him.

“Lan Zhan, ready?”

“Mn.”

“Okay, let’s get things over with.” Wei Wuxian flips Chenqing out of his belt and walks towards the array.

“Wei Wuxian.” Jiang Cheng grabs his brother’s arm. Wei Wuxian glances back, looking at him with a questioning look in his eyes. He can see Lan Wangji looking at them as well, but he keeps his attention on his brother.

“Just...be careful, alright? If you think anything might go wrong...”

“Jiang Cheng, don’t worry. Lan Zhan will be there.” Wei Wuxian reaches his arm out to squeeze his shoulders. Jiang Cheng lets out a small snort.

“I won’t go too far away either then. You think I’ll let that fuddy-fuddy protect you alone?” He hates that he can’t do more, that he can’t be right by his brother’s side while everything is happening. Lingering resentment rises up inside him when he realizes that Lan Wangji is once again acting as Wei Wuxian’s protector. He shakes it away quickly. It will be his job to protect his brother elsewhere.

“Just keep those fierce corpses away, alright?” Wei Wuxian gives him a soft smile before he drops his arms away. Jiang Cheng doesn’t let go yet, not before pulling the older into a hug. After that he watches his brother disappear from sight.

He doesn’t hear anything from the location of his brother at first, no thrumming of energy, nothing. At first, he thinks it can be a good thing, that everything is going smoothly. Then the fierce corpses start coming. Some of the minor sect disciples let out shouts in alarm but the Jiang disciples quickly calm them down.

“How do we know this isn’t a trap?” one Yao disciples mutters. “He’s the only one who can be controlling them right?”

“Are you accusing the Jiang sect?” A Jiang disciples says sharply. “Our shixiong wants the amulet destroyed just as much as you do. He warned us that this may attract fierce corpses. Keep your complaint to yourself and focus on fighting them instead.”

There’s only a dozen fierce corpses at first. They’re slow in movement, so the disciples make quick work of cutting them down. Just then, the resentment in the air suddenly feels much heavier, enough that Jiang Cheng finds it difficult to breathe.

“Sect leader! There’s a whole wave of corpses coming!” A Jiang disciples yell.

“Keep fighting them!” He shouts back. He unleashes Zidian and whips it out in a wide arc. The disciples closest to him duck down as the purple energy knocks five corpses at once. He shoots a look in the direction of the array and narrows his eyes to see the resentment swirling in the air. His heart skips a beat. Was this a good thing or a bad thing? He quickly moves himself closer in the direction of the array, cutting down fierce corpses as he goes. He notices Lan Xichen following him, ordering the disciples to keep fighting. As they got closer to the array however, he’s alarmed to see even more fierce corpses. These ones are different, much more ferocious. There are way more corpses than he thought there’d be. Something is not right. Through the chaos, he swears he can hear the sound of a flute. He jumps onto the tree and closes his eyes to concentrate. It’s not Chenqing, that’s for sure. The person playing is inexperienced, playing horribly, in fact. In the old timeline, Jiang Cheng knows there’s only one other person who had been capable of controlling corpses: Su She.

He suddenly hears strangled cries coming from the center of the Burial Mounds and he turns around, alarmed. When he looks at Lan Xichen, he can see the fear in the other’s eyes. Both their brothers are there and possibly in danger.

“Something’s gone wrong.” The panic in Lan Xichen’s usual calm and collected voice only makes him more nervous. “Did you hear that second flute as well?”

“I did...it attracted all the fierce corpses here. It was a diversion. We have to go.” He takes off running in a sprint and he can see the giant cloud of resentment swirling around where his brother is supposed to be.

“Wei Wuxian!” Jiang Cheng can’t help but yell out the other’s name. There’s no response, only the howling of wind.

“Jiang Cheng! Stay back! There’s too much-!” His voice is cut off by sudden *screaming* , not of his brother’s voice. It’s a high-pitched scream, like that of a banshee’s. The resentment thickens once again.

“Wei Wuxian!”

“Wangji!”

As they take one step closer in the direction of the array, a strong wave of resentful energy sends them flying backwards and Jiang Cheng just *barely* manages to break his fall. Once his vision clears, he steadies himself, panting heavily and looks over at Lan Xichen who’s leaning against a tree.

“What was that?” Jiang Cheng gasps out. “An explosion?”

“Something really went wrong...it can’t have been the array.” Lan Xichen says, his voice hoarse, clearly out of breath. “My uncle and even the sect elders helped to check it. Someone must have interfered with the array. Or set up a counter array.” He pushes himself off the tree and starts heading towards the array again. Jiang Cheng quickly stands up and follows him.

“Wangji!” Lan Xichen suddenly runs past him and Jiang Cheng quickens his pace. Soon, he’s able to see what had made the Lan sect leader panic so much. Lan Wangji is lying on the ground, clearly unconscious. Before Jiang Cheng reaches their side, something makes his blood runs cold. His brother is nowhere in sight

Chapter End Notes

The 'lotus yaos' in this episode were inspired by that one MDZS Q episode where WWX had those little vegetable yaos with faces running around the Burial Mounds. I might do a random sketch for it and link it to a later chapter :))

I hope you enjoyed this chapter and be sure to leave a comment <3

I just want to thank my readers for coming this far with me for this story. All your comments have been encouraging me all this way! We're almost close to the end for this story. I have added the "final" chapter count, but I know myself too well and it will most

likely change. Nevertheless, I hope everyone will stick with me until the end and after this, check out my other stories. Thank you everyone!

Chapter 30

Chapter Notes

CW for torture and blood

Wei Wuxian wakes up to his head throbbing and a familiar voice calling to him. Blinking his eyes open, he realizes he's lying on a cold concrete floor, his hands shackled together. It's definitely not the Burial Mounds.

"Wei-xiong...." Wei Wuxian tries to sit up but falls back when pain shoots through his body. Arms catch him before he can hit the floor again.

"Who...?"

"It's me, Huaisang..."

"Where are we?" Wei Wuxian goes tense, countless thoughts running through his mind. He'd been in the Burial Mounds just now. Just moments after destroying the amulet, the resentful energy had turned on him and Lan Zhan. They'd been fending it off for a while when unexpectedly, they heard a second flute. That's when the resentful energy started going wild, its tendrils curling into sharp blades and attacking them mercilessly. After that, everything had been a blur. The last thing he had heard was Lan Zhan screaming his name and his head slamming into the ground.

"We're in some kind of dungeon...I was knocked out too, so I didn't see clearly."

"How did they get to you? Weren't you in Unclean Realm?" Wei Wuxian sits up, aware of the throbbing in his head. A wave of fury washes over him that their enemy had dared to kidnap even his friend.

"I think it was Su She..." Huaisang says in a shaky voice. "He had a mask on so I can't be sure, but I can't think of who else it could be with Xue Yang dead."

"Su She got into Unclean Realm?" Wei Wuxian frowns. As average as the man's cultivation was the last time he had seen him, Wei Wuxian knows he is not unintelligent. He'd been able to start up his own sect in less than a year after all.

"His men took me by surprise. Most of the guards were with Da-ge in the Burial Mounds, so they took advantage of the situation."

"Did they hurt you?" Wei Wuxian pushes himself upwards but immediately regrets it when the room spins around him.

“Wei-xiong!” Hands quickly grab his arms, supporting him upwards.

“You’re not hurt, right?”

“I’m fine, Wei-xiong! Worry about yourself first! You’re *bleeding*!” Huaisang sounds frustrated. Wei Wuxian hadn’t even noticed the blood dripping from his forehead. He tries reaching for his still-tiny core, but this only causes more pain to shoot through his body. The shackles must be blocking his spiritual energy. He takes a deep shuddering breath and tries to concentrate.

“Hold still.” His friend tears off strips from his robes and wraps them around his forehead.

“You’re lucky you don’t have a concussion...it would be really bad...especially when-,” He breaks off with a startled squeal as the doors of the dungeons are thrown open. Wei Wuxian pushes himself to his feet, standing in front of his friends in a defensive stance.

“Wei Wuxian, are you really going to be brave in a situation like this? No flute and no amulet either.” The smug look on Jin Guangshan’s face only makes Wei Wuxian clench his fist more, accompanied by the desire to punch the man’s face.

“I destroyed the amulet.” Wei Wuxian raises his gaze defiantly. “You can’t get your hands on it.”

“Are you sure?”

Jin Guangshan takes out a qiankun pouch from his robes. Immediately, Wei Wuxian can feel the resentful energy from it.

“Did you forget you split the amulet into two halves?”

Wei Wuxian feels the oxygen drain out of his lungs at once.

No way...I only destroyed one half? That can’t be right . He thinks, panicking internally.

There had been too much chaos. Wei Wuxian had been sure he kept his focus on destroying the halves of amulet, but the resentful energy had also been influencing his mind and trying to attack his body at the same time. Even Lan Zhan’s playing had only done its bare minimum against the sheer amount of resentful energy in the Burial Mounds.

“I also have the yin iron from Xue Yang.” Jin Guangshan holds the qiankun pouch triumphantly in his hands and if it weren’t for the shackles around Wei Wuxian’s wrist, he’d have snatched it by now.

“The last piece.”

“It is the yin iron, but it is not the last piece.” Jin Guangshan snickers. “Do you really think people didn’t suspect what your amulet was made of? Who do you think spread the speculation around.”

Jin Guangshan steps closer into the room and Wei Wuxian pushes Huaisang into the corner, mentally calculating if they can escape the room; it seems unlikely with the number of masked men lined up in the hallway outside.

“The Yin Iron is intelligent, suppressed in four directions. All the energy of the four directions points to Xuanwu.”

Oh...so Xue Yang already told him there was a fifth piece of the Yin Iron. He repeated those same words to me back at Yi City.

“Wei-xiong, what is he saying?”

“Don’t play dumb,” Wei Wuxian whispers back. “I thought you’d already know this. How else do you think Xue Yang reforged the amulet?”

“You *did* forge the amulet with a piece of yin iron, so my suspicions were correct. However, I just never saw what the amulet’s original form was.”

“A sword. Inside the Xuanwu,” Wei Wuxian replies. He sees no reason to conceal the fact. “It had been refined already.” He lets out a scoff. “But I will never forge another amulet for you. Why do you think I wanted to destroy it as soon as possible? I knew you wanted to get your hands on it. You even tried to make Xue Yang do your dirty work for you. It’s a pity he wasn’t able to forge the amulet for you.”

“Ha! I tried getting that useless son of mine to earn your trust, get your guard down so he can get his hands on your manuscripts but.” Jin Guangshan sneers. “You somehow enticed him and manipulated him and he lost trust in me. He no longer wanted to be around me!”

“You were using him!” Huaisang speaks up bravely from behind Wei Wuxian. “San-ge is worth more than your acceptance!”

“You say *I* manipulated him?” Wei Wuxian can’t help but laugh. “When you wanted him to do your dirty work? Your son was just smart enough to realize he was being used and found comfort in those who truly believed in him. Did you ever consider him as your son or was he just your puppet?”

A hand suddenly grabs his collar and yanks him out of the room with full force. “Wei-xiong!” Huaisang tries to grab him, but seeing the guards step forward, Wei Wuxian pushes his friend back into the room just before the door slams shut. He grunts as he hits the concrete floor.

“Wei-xiong!” his friend continues to cry out in panic.

“Stop! Stay put, okay?” Wei Wuxian gasps. “It’ll be fine...Jiang Cheng and Lan Zhan will find this place. And your brother.”

“*Sure* they will.” Jin Guangshan gestures to his disciples and they force him to his feet. “They will never suspect we are here.”

“Where even is this place? You couldn’t have gotten into Carp Tower.” Wei Wuxian looks past Jin Guangshan, but can only see a shadowed corridor.

“This palace once belonged to Wen Ruohan.”

H

“This palace once belonged to Wen Ruohan.”

Huaisang's suspicions were correct. Didn't he already tell his brother?

The next thing he knows, he feels a sharp pain in his neck and everything goes black. When he wakes up again, he's suspended in mid-air by chains and cuffs around his legs and arms. Jin Guangshan stands in front of him, a whip in his hands.

Ha...I'm way used to his . Wei Wuxian thinks.

“This is Wen Ruohan's dungeon. Do you know what he liked to do with his prisoners? I just happened to come across one of his favorite torture devices. I'm sure you know all sects have a discipline whip.”

Wei Wuxian stares at the whip, noticing the spikes protruding its surface.

“I can let my nephew have some fun with you too.

He looks in the corner of the dungeon and inhales sharply. Jin Zixun's *corpse* stares back at him with pupilless eyes. Wei Wuxian can finally see him clearly now; his skin is pale and bloodless and black lines crawl up his neck like snakes.

“Jin Zixun, my nephew.” Jin Guangshan says, his voice is soft in a way that sends shivers down Wei Wuxian's spine. “Died so horribly and it was due to your hundred holes curse.”

“I never cursed anyone. Are you not aware that the person you recruited, Su Mishan is the person that cast the curse?”

“How dare you slander our sect leader!” An unfamiliar voice yells out. Wei Wuxian blinks, staring at the almost-familiar white robes.

They must be from the Su Sect...

“Reforge the seal for us and I can let this all go.” Jin Guangshan tells him. “I have to reclaim what is mine. Both of my sons are traitors. Even my beloved Zixuan got corrupted by the likes of you. He is unfilial! It's clear that the Jin sect is being corrupted by weaklings.”

“What is yours?” Wei Wuxian lets out a scathing laugh. “Since when did the seal belong to you? The other sects would never have agreed for you to have it. Do you think nobody caught on your greedy-,” He breaks off as a stinging pain shoots through his lower body.

“I should have known you'd be stubborn.” Jin Guangshan's voice cuts through his haziness. “Be thankful it's not your friend in the other room...or perhaps, I should send my nephew over there to have some fun.”

“No!” Wei Wuxian shouts. “Leave him out of it!”

“It’s clear that you’re not going to comply with my requests. Why should I comply with yours?”

“Uncle.” Zixun’s voice sends shivers down Wei Wuxian’s spine. “Forget the Nie brat. Why don’t we have some fun with this one?”

“Hmm, you’re right, Zixun. Let’s see how long he can keep up his headstrong facade.”

“Hmm, you’re right, Zixun. Let’s see how long he can keep up his headstrong facade.”

Wei Wuxian closes his eyes as the whip comes down again, strike after strike. The spikes from the whip tear his robes and cut into his flesh. Warm blood trickles down his body. He grits his teeth against the pain, not allowing Jin Guangshan the satisfaction. The last thing he hears before falling unconscious is the soft cling of the clarity bell as it falls from his waist.

~

Jiang Cheng kneels down next to Lan Wangji, helping the other man to sit up and passes some spiritual energy to him, copying Xichen. His disciples are already searching the area, looking for any signs of clues for the kidnappers or anything his brother could have left behind. He can’t find any signs of a struggle among the debris of dirt and flattened bushes caused by the destruction of the amulet. The only thing he’s able to find of his brother is Chenqing and the torn tassel from the Jiang’s clarity bell.

The minor sects have long left by now. Some of them, even Sect leader Ouyang had offered to help him search for Wei Wuxian; Jiang Cheng didn’t expect much from them, even if his sect had been allies with the Jiang for a very long time. Meanwhile, the other three sect leaders stand in front of him, already sending disciples to search for Wei Wuxian.

“It was my fault...I lost sight of him for just a moment, I was focused on dispelling the resentful energy.” Lan Wangji bows his head.

“Wangji...” Xichen begins.

“Blaming anyone but the culprits will do us no good,” Jiang Cheng says briskly. He can feel Zidian’s energy thrumming on his wrist, responding to the emotions that are threatening to break through the surface at any moment. How can he stay calm when his brother was most likely in Jin Guangshan’s hands? He tries not to think about how Wei Wuxian’s current state, kidnapped by the enemy and unable to fight back after the destruction of the amulet weakened him.

“The resentful energy must have been overwhelming. Did you happen to see anyone?” Lan Wangji frowns as if he’s trying to think.

“Shadowed figures...I couldn’t see their faces.”

“Sect leader Jiang, I will send as many as my men to help you find your brother,” Nie Mingjue says. “Zonghui sent me a message...they have Huaisang too.”

“They broke into Unclean Realm?” Xichen exclaims, shock on his face.

“Is my f-, is Jin Guangshan trying to make an enemy of all the sects? What does he think will happen to go after the Nie heir?” Jin Zixuan shakes his head. “Sect leader Jiang I...my family has caused yours pain again and for that, I apologize.”

“A-Xuan...” Yanli takes hold of her husband’s arm. She’d arrive soon after Jiang Cheng sent the news out to her with MianMian accompanying her.

“You’ve been trying your best. Jin Guangshan is no longer part of the sect, he’s been cast out. You do not need to take responsibility for his actions.” Jin Zixuan shakes his head again.

“A-Li, as his son, I didn’t even notice the crimes he committed until it was too late. And then afterward, he escaped under my watch...”

“Enough.” Jiang Cheng’s patience has snapped. “I told you that blaming yourself won’t do anything. We’re simply wasting time! The longer Wei Wuxian is in Jin Guangshan’s hands, the more danger he is in!”

“Sect leader Jiang is correct. We must find Wei Ying.” Lan Wangji’s eyes shine in determination.

“When we find Jin Guangshan, I will gladly sever his head from his shoulders,” Nie Mingjue says with a growl. Jiang Cheng rubs at Zidian, feeling the electricity humming under his fingers. He shares the same killing intent with the other sect leader. Jin Guangshan will pay the price for laying a hand on their brothers.

“Is there anyone else you suspect other than Jin Guangshan and his goons? They may have had allies.”

Su She. It’s got to be him. There’s no way they would have gone far without a teleportation talisman. Jiang Cheng thinks. But he can’t say this out loud. He had no evidence. Only he, Lan Wangji, Wei Wuxian, and Huaisang know that Su She is the most likely culprit.

“I’m really hoping...it’s *not* A-Yao,” Jin Zixuan mutters. Lan Xichen turns, frowning at the mention of his sworn brother.

“A-Yao? Why would he be involved in this? He is friends with Young Master Wei.”

“No...I...I didn’t mean anything by it,” Jin Zixuan says quickly. “I don’t think it is him, truly. He’s been a great help to me.”

“Meng Yao was the one who informed me about the attack on Unclean Realm.” Nie Mingjue tells them. “My second in-command, Zonghui saw him fighting off the intruders. Unfortunately, they had a teleportation talisman...I do not believe he is guilty of colluding with Jin Guangshan. He even got injured in the process”

I can’t help but still be suspicious. It’s not unlikely that he would play innocent.

“Sect leader Jiang, you seem to be having doubts.”

Jiang Cheng jerks his head up, snapping out of this thoughts. He catches Lan Wangji staring at him and meeting his eye, he knows the other man is having the same thought as him.

“No,” Jiang Cheng says hastily. “Perhaps in the beginning, I was wary. Meng Yao was someone who was determined to be recognized and praised by his father. I thought he had ulterior motives in approaching my brother, but what I’ve seen this past year have proved me wrong.”

“Getting him away from Jin Guangshan was a good call. We were lucky to expose his crimes sooner than later,” Nie Mingjue adds.

“Now, we should keep looking. We’ve talked enough.” He says this a little bluntly, but the other sect leaders seem to understand for they turn around and start calling out orders to their disciples.

“Sect leader,” Luo Qingyang says. “I will lead a search party to find leads on the culprits. We will investigate the Moling area first.”

“Thank you, MianMian. And be careful. Do not try fighting Jin Zixun head on. We don’t know how powerful of a fierce corpse he is.”

“Of course. Thank you for being worried about me.”

“That goes without saying,” Jin Zixuan huffs. “And stop being so formal with me, I’ve told you there’s no need.”

She gives him a smirk and a light punch to the arm before leaving the room.

“She’s a good head disciple, isn’t she?” Nie Mingjue comments.

“She is. Even my mother dotes on her. The sect elders were against a woman being my second in-command, but my mother helped to shut them down fairly quickly. She trusts MianMian and so do I.”

“I remember Huaisang telling me Jin Guangshan may be in Nightless City,” Nie Mingjue addresses everyone. “We should search there first.”

“Understood.” Jin Zixuan nods.

“I need to send some disciples back to Lotus Pier.” Jiang Cheng had realized, that if their enemy was able to penetrate Unclean Realm, they could do the same to Lotus Pier.”

“You’ve sent a message to Lady Wen already then?”

“Of course,” Jiang Cheng replies.

“Why don’t you allow me to escort her to Unclean Realm?” Nie Mingjue offers. Jiang Cheng blinks with surprise.

“When we find our brothers, it will be better to keep her in a location close by. They may need medical attention.”

Jiang Cheng nods with agreement. He tries not to worry about how *badly* his brother could be hurt. He’d seen firsthand how cruel the Jins could be. His brother’s body is still fragile and weak; the small core he has can only do so much. They need to hurry.

“I give you permission then. Thank you.” Nie Mingjue gives him one final nod and leads his disciples out of the Burial Mounds. Lan Wangji

“I have this. But I do not think it will help. I just wanted to tell you.” Lan Wangji holds out the black talisman and Jiang Cheng lets out a sigh of relief.

“As long as Jin Guangshan doesn’t have his hands on it....” Lan Xichen sounds relieved as well.

“He may blow himself up with it he tried activating it. I would be fine with it if my sworn brothers weren’t in the proximity of the blast.” Jiang Cheng scoffs slightly. *It’d serve him right for being a power-hungry asshole*.

Lan Wangji doesn’t follow his brother and his disciples out from the burial mounds.

“Let’s go then,” Jiang Cheng tells him, already expecting his company. “I’ll have my disciples spread out but stay close enough so that they’ll come if trouble arises.”

Wei Wuxian, you idiot...don’t you dare die. Just hold on. We’re coming...

Chapter 31

Chapter Notes

Mini chapter spoiler: someone gets to die early :))

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“It’s too quiet,” Lan Wangji says. Jiang Cheng huffs in response, but keeps his focus on scanning the bushes and the trees above. He wouldn’t put it past archers to be hiding in the trees. Suddenly there’s a loud crash in the trees above. Jiang Cheng swings out Zidian instinctively.

“Wait, it’s me! Argh! How does Wei Wuxian even ride this thing?”

“Young Master J-, Meng?” Jiang Cheng frowns. The man stumbles out from the bushes, brushing off leaves and dirt. The hundun rolls out next to him and immediately runs over to Jiang Cheng and Lan Wangji, jumping up and down.

“Wonton.” Lan Wangji replies in a deadpanned voice.

“Yes, I am aware. It’s not every day you see a hundun.” Jiang Cheng retorts.

“Meng Yao, why did you follow us?”

“I can get you into the palace.” Meng Yao pauses. “Without being detected.”

Jiang Cheng blinks. Of course, how could he forget that Meng Yao had been a spy and pretended to be Wen Ruohan’s henchman?

“Lead the way then.” Jiang Cheng retracts Zidian. He catches Lan Wangji giving him a look, but he doesn’t say anything. Meng Yao leads them through the trees. Jiang Cheng and Lan Wangji flank him on both sides, knowing the man is weak in cultivation.

“My best guess is that he was brought to the Inferno Palace...or Wen Ruohan’s special chamber.” As he speaks, Jiang Cheng sees a shudder run down the man’s spine.

“Torture chamber,” Jiang Cheng says, unable to remain his own composure. Next to him Lan Wangji quickens his pace, his robes fluttering in the wind as he walks past the both of them.

“Hanguang-jun, don’t. I know you’re anxious...but we mustn’t be reckless,” Meng Yao tells him.

“He’s right. We can’t alert them that we’re here,” Jiang Cheng reaches out to lay a hand on the other man’s shoulder. “If they know, they’ll threaten him in order to try to control us.” he

remembers Jin Ling telling him about how his xiao-shushu had held the guqin string around Wei Wuxian's throat, forcing Lan Wangji to sheath his weapon and sealing his spiritual energy.

Lan Wangji looks over at him and nods once. Jiang Cheng instructs him to patrol the area and he reluctantly relents.

"Meng Yao," Jiang Cheng says carefully, making sure Lan Wangji is out of range. "I want to thank you for helping us."

"Wei-xiong is my friend...of course I'd help."

"At the same time, you're going against your father."

Meng Yao is silent for a long time.

"I've always kept Wei-xiong's words in mind. I had my doubts in the beginning, but I became more alert to my father's behavior at Carp Tower. After the reveals of the labor camps and what he did to Madam Qin...I could no longer support him."

If I had known better, he may have done that to save his own reputation before he got dragged down with his father. Jiang Cheng thinks.

"I am not sure how much your brother told you...but it seems like you are still cautious about me even if you trust me to be near your brother."

"I trust my brother to know what he was doing," Jiang Cheng says curtly. "I wasn't really sure if friendship would sway your desire to want your father's approval and acknowledgement."

"Sect leader Jiang..."

"But I understand why you would want to do everything in your effort to gain it."

He brushes his fingers over Zidian.

"It wasn't easy growing up in Lotus Pier when your father would rather look at Wei Wuxian than his own son. No matter how much I tried, I wasn't the perfect heir for him." He sighs. "My mother also told me I would never be as good as him."

"Were you not bitter?"

"Of course, I was," Jiang Cheng replies honestly. "Wei Wuxian and A-jie always gave me as much encouragement and praise as they could. In a way, I think they wanted to make up for what my parents always said. And then, in the end, I realized my father wasn't entirely wrong."

"What?" Meng Yao stares at him.

“I can’t be like Wei Wuxian. It’s impossible to be someone you are not. I can’t be as *good* as he is, as strong as he is because I am not *him*. I have my own strengths and weaknesses.”

“Why are you telling me this?”

“My brother has told me enough about you and your background.” The other man immediately tenses.

“People who don’t understand you well enough will always try to find faults in you. There aren’t many like Zewu-jun and my A-jie who always try to find the good in people.”

Meng Yao nods in understanding.

“There were only a few people in my life that were willing to overlook my upbringing and backgrounds and see me for who I am.”

“Then keep those people close to you.” Jiang Cheng looks at him. “You shouldn’t have to change yourself into a different person just to get another’s approval.”

“Of course.”

“By the way...how did you come across Hundun?”

“Oh.” Meng Yao shrugs. “It came across me. It crash-landed into the courtyard.”

“It just flew to Qinghe?” Jiang Cheng says, baffled.

“I think...it must have sensed that its master was in danger. And it came to someone that he knew his master trusted.” He says this while staring, almost challengingly at Jiang Cheng, as if he’s still thinking of their earlier conversation.

“Well...we can never have too much help. You know Nightless City the best.” Jiang Cheng nods at him.

“We’re almost there,” Meng Yao says. “We just need to go up this way.” He gestures towards the cliff. They wait until Lan Wangji and the disciples catch up to them.

“Is this the back of the palace?” Jiang Cheng asks and Meng Yao nods.

“It’s risky going through the front.

“We can keep watch here or on the rooftop.” A Jiang disciple approaches Jiang Cheng.

“There’s secret tunnels under the palace,” Meng Yao tells the disciple. “You may need to find out where one leads out and block it off.”

“Understood.”

They separate into two groups and Jiang Cheng leads the way into the palace. They cut down every Jin disciple without mercy, only sparing a couple for interrogation

“Help! I’m down here!” Jiang Cheng runs towards the voice. Lan Wangji continues down the hallway.

“Huaisang!”

“Jiang-xiong!” Huaisang’s voice comes from behind the iron door.

“Stand away from the door!” Jiang Cheng commands. He hears the shuffling of footsteps and then hits the door as hard as he can with Zidian. He steps into the room and raises his sword to cut the chain. As he does so, he notices the dent where the chain is attached to the wall. He decides to ignore it and crouches down next to his friend.

“Are you alright? Are you hurt?” Jiang Cheng checks him all over before handing the young man a flask of water.

“I’m fine...” Huaisang rasps out once he finishes drinking. “They didn’t touch me at all.” He gulps. “But Wei-xiong...”

“What...” Jiang Cheng begins and stops. In a way, he wants to know what happened but he’s also afraid of hearing what his brother might have had to endure.

“I could hear him from down the hallway,” Huaisang murmurs. He doesn’t seem too keen on filling Jiang Cheng in with the details either, but he can see how badly shaken his friend is. All the worrisome thoughts Jiang Cheng had been trying to push away come back with full force. A loud crash makes him jump, spinning around with Zidian raised. Huaisang hides behind his back, but out of the corner of his eye, Jiang Cheng sees him pulling out his fan.

“You had that the entire time?!”

“I hid it in my sleeve...I was trying to use it to cut the chain. It was exhausting and I couldn’t risk the guards hearing me so I didn’t use a lot of energy.”

“They didn’t seal your spiritual energy.”

“No...they must have assumed my core is too weak for me to have any power to fight back.”

“Tch.”

He starts to explore the other side room to look for clues while Huaisang and Lan Wangji stand guard by the door. On the wall, Jiang Cheng’s heart pounds as he makes out splatters of red. Stepping closer, he can see that the blood is *fresh*. He starts searching the ground. A set of chains lays against the wall, discarded. A whip is next to the chain; its black color made it difficult for Jiang Cheng to see but as he crouches down to touch it, his finger comes away stained with red. He notices the spikes along the entire body of the whip, protruding from every angle.

How unusual...I’ve never seen a whip like this before. Did the Jins really own such a thing?

“That’s...that’s the Wen discipline whip.” He didn’t even notice Meng Yao coming to stand next to him. Jiang Cheng turns his head slightly and he’s startled to see how pale the other

man looks. It's rare to see him this fazed about something. The last time he had seen the man looking so scared was when he saw Wen Ning holding Baxia.

Suddenly, he hears an explosion, causing the walls and the ground to shake. He's nearly knocked off his feet.

What the-

"What's happening?" Huaisang yells in panic.

"Run!" Jiang Cheng yells. He grabs Meng Yao and Huaisang and practically throws them out of the room just before the ceiling collapses on top of them.

"Jiang Wanyin!" There's a flutter of white robes and then hands pull him to his feet. "Did you hear that explosion?"

"I heard it. What caused it?" he pants out.

"It came from down the tunnel. We should go to it." Lan Wangji starts walking away.

"Go towards it?" Huaisang yelps. "But what if it happens again and the tunnel collapses on us?"

"It will not."

What did he just do? Jiang Cheng thinks desperately. That explosion is the same one they'd heard when Wei Wuxian destroyed the amulet.

"Lan Wangji," Jiang Cheng breathes as they come to a landing. He grabs the other man before he can attack. "Did my brother destroy the entire amulet?"

"He split it into two pieces."

"That doesn't answer my question," Jiang Cheng snaps impatiently.

"I did not see..."

"Jin Guangshan had the piece of yin iron from Xue Yang," Huaisang interrupts. "He would have wanted Wei-xiong to repair the amulet..."

"He would have never agreed," Jiang Cheng says grimly. "They may have tried to threaten you to get him to obey but somehow..."

"He kept their attention on himself," Huaisang finishes his sentence in a hoarse voice.

"Several times I heard the guards talking about bringing me out but I heard Wei-xiong's voice and..." His voice trails away.

Of course, he would. Wei Wuxian would never let them touch Huaisang.

"We need to hurry."

They follow Lan Wangji's lead down the tunnel. The torches on the side of the rocky wall light up as they run down.

"Is this one of Wen Ruohan's secret tunnels?"

"It is." Meng Yao replies. "This one should lead to the main palace or the back mountains, but normally the tunnels were used for dragging victims *to* the Inferno Palace rather than away from it." The underlying meaning of his words is clear: No victims made it out of the Inferno Palace alive. They continue walking but stop when they hear voices.

"That Wei Wuxian was really seeking out his death when he tried pulling off such a stunt."

"I think he was trying to bring the entire palace down with that explosion...but his plan failed. Luckily, our sect leader was only slightly injured. Wei Wuxian was not so lucky."

Jiang Cheng inhales sharply. He readjusts his grip on Sandu and inches forward more to listen more intently.

"Sect leader Jin was quite furious...haha, it's a good thing he had a backup plan. Zixun-xiong has every right to get his revenge as a result of dying from that curse that Wei Wuxian cast. I don't even *mind* him being a fierce corpse."

"Ha, Wei Wuxian is apparently the master of demonic cultivation, but what can he do against a fierce corpse with that amount of resentment without any of his weapons?"

Jiang Cheng finally swings himself out of his hiding place, sending Zidian to wrap around the closest Jin disciple and slamming him into the wall. Lan Wangji and others quickly follow his lead, killing the other Jin disciples.

"Where did they take him?" Jiang Cheng demands. The Jin disciple glares at him defiantly.

"What good will it be trying to find him now? You'll only find a corpse after Jin Zixun is done with him-," He breaks off with a harsh choke as Zidian tightens even further around his throat.

"I won't ask again. Where is he?"

"Throne..room.." The Jin disciple wheezes out. Jiang Cheng draws back Zidian and the Jin disciple collapses to the ground, gasping for breath.

"Tie him up."

Huaisang and Meng Yao do as he says, securing the Jin disciple with qi-suppressing robes and forcing him to stand up. Lan Wangji keeps his sword at the back of the disciple's neck as they walk onwards.

"Here!" Meng Yao stops suddenly, pointing at something on the ground.

Blood.

Lan Wangji runs past them and his white robes disappear down the tunnel. Moments later, a startled yell echoes down the tunnel followed by the sound of clashing metal. The three of them quicken their paces and they round a corner just in time to see Lan Wangji lunging towards Jin Guangshan with Bichen. Jiang Cheng jumps into the fight, knocking away any Jin disciples that tried to come close. The captured Jin disciple is thrown to one side as Huaisang and Meng Yao join the brawl.

Soon, Lan Wangji has Jin Guangshan cornered on one side of the cave tunnel, the sword pointed towards his throat. Nie Huaisang joins his side, gripping the fan firmly in his hand.

“Where. is. Wei Ying?”

“Tell us where Wei-xiong is!” Huaisang’s voice is shaky but has a fierce tone to it that Jiang Cheng can’t help but admire. He starts walking towards them, Sandu gripped tightly in his hand.

“Well? Aren’t you going to answer them? Or would you rather answer to my whip?”

“Pah.” Jin Guangshan still has the audacity to laugh. “You’re really every bit like your mother, aren’t you?”

Zidian crackles once and Jiang Cheng curls his lips in a snarl. “Would you want to find out for yourself?”

He takes another step toward Jin Guangshan and feels undeniable satisfaction at the fear he sees in the other man’s eyes. Then something shiny on the ground catches his eyes and he moves towards it. His hand shakes as he reaches out to pick up a clarity bell. His *brother’s* clarity bell. It’s the same one Jiang Cheng had given to him along with his new purple robes. It’s also covered in blood; it’s fresh and wet and it stains Jiang Cheng’s fingers as he grips it in his hands. A fresh image comes into Jiang Cheng’s mind: of Jin Guangshan standing over his brother, the whip in his hands. For a while, he sees nothing but red.

They really tortured him...but why is he not here? Where did they take him? And what was that explosion?

Zidian starts to glow and crackle on his wrist and he turns on his heel, lashing out the whip with all his might. Lan Wangji and Huaisang quickly take a few steps back to avoid being hit and the spiritual weapon wraps around Jin Guangshan’s throat. Jiang Cheng yanks hard, slamming the man onto the cave floor.

“What did you do to him?” Jiang Cheng spits. He grips the clarity bell tight in his fist. Behind him, Meng Yao unsheathes his own sword at the former Jin sect leader.

“You!” Jin Guangshan glares at his own. “Traitor!” He yells. Zidian tightens further, making his words trail off into a choking sputter.

“Who did I betray?” Meng Yao asks calmly. “What did I ever get in exchange for trying to be loyal to you?” He tightens the grip on his sword. “You never offered me warmth or love the

way Er-ge and Wei-xiong did. You even tried to use me to get to my friend. Did you know I only pretended to go along with you in order to pass information to him?"

"Sect leader!" Another man runs down the tunnel. A Jin disciple. He sees a flash of silver and Jiang Cheng turns with Sandu raised but Huaisang is faster, knocking him back.

"You! You think you're so tough just because you know how to fight now?" the Jin disciple lunges again, but Lan Wangji intercepts, pushing the man back into the wall and killing him.

"Stand guard at the end of the tunnel," Jiang Cheng tells Meng Yao and Huaisang. "We'll finish this quickly. The two comply and go to stand by the door with their weapons raised.

"Where is my brother?" Jiang Cheng points Sandu at Jin Guangshan's throat, close enough so that the tip is barely an inch away from it.

"You really value that Wei Wuxian of yours that much?" Jin Guangshan sneers at him despite the fact that he's tied up and unable to fight. "You call him your brother despite his father being a servant?" He breaks off with a choked cry of pain as Zidian wraps even tighter around him.

"Shut up!" Jiang Cheng snarls. "Keep his name out of your mouth, you scum!"

"I am still a high-ranking member of the Jin sect! You can't do this!"

"Oh yeah?" Jiang Cheng sneers. "You really think your sect will stand by you after what you did? Even if they did, what about the other sects? You dared to hurt the sworn brother of Chifeng-zun's brother and the so-to-be husband of the Second Jade. There will be nobody on your side." He steps forward, and presses the tip into the other man's throat, making blood trickle downwards. "I won't ask again. *Where. Is. My. Brother?*"

"He should be with Zixun." Jin Guangshan's voice is eerily calm. Jiang Cheng nearly drops his sword, but his grip on it tightens quickly.

"What did you just say?"

"My nephew...don't you know how horribly he died?" Jin Guangshan is grinning at him.

"He got cursed by that brother of yours and died because of the Hundred-holes curse. So when I was offered the chance for him to get his revenge, how could I refuse? Besides." Jin Guangshan's voice grows even angrier. "He lied to us about reforging the amulet and nearly made the entire tunnel collapse by activating that array!"

So he really did try to destroy it....but without Lan Wangji there to anchor him, what would have happened?

"Wei-xiong is with Zixun?" Huaisang croaks out weakly. Jiang Cheng has nearly forgotten his friend was there.

"I gave him to Jixun as a plaything. He'll be able to get his revenge."

Jiang Cheng's heart nearly stops upon hearing those words, his entire body feeling cold.

"Sect leader Jiang. Hanguang-jun. Do not fall for his tricks. He is stalling us!" Meng Yao calls out.

Jin Guangshan is still smiling and before Jiang Cheng can register what's happening, the former Jin sect leader is thrown to the wall so violently that Jiang Cheng had to call back Zidian to avoid his wrist from being dislocated. Lan Wangji lunges at Jin Guangshan, and without hesitation, thrusts his sword into the man's chest. Jiang Cheng moves to stand beside him and Zidian snaps forward, wrapping around the man's throat. They watch in silence as the man chokes, his eyes pleading. Jiang Cheng sends one final burst of energy into Zidian. A sizzling sound fills the air along with the burning smell of flesh. Jin Guangshan's head now lays on the floor, his eyes blank and unseeing.

"Glad that that's over." Nie Huaisang's voice cuts the silence. Jiang Cheng looks over to his friend who's looking at the remains of Jin Guangshan's body with an emotionless stare. He's never heard his friend look or sound so cold.

Jiang Cheng doesn't regret what he did. He didn't care that he'd originally agreed to apprehend Jin Guangshan and bring him back for punishment. He'd explain everything to them later and he's sure that they will understand his actions.

"Wei Ying... Wei Ying he..." the fear in Lan Wangji's voice is undeniable. Jiang Cheng is still too much in shock to respond, the terror inside of him numbing his senses and keeping him frozen in place. He pushes away the image of Jin Zixun thrusting his fist through his brother's chest, the same thing that had caused Jin Zixuan's death in the previous timeline.

"We need to keep moving." He starts running again without waiting for the others.

Chapter End Notes

WAHHH I finally got past 100k ways. I'm sh00kk <3

- Finally got in some JC and JGY convo. Hopefully, it was good!
- Also yes, I did kill JGS early bc he's been alive for far too long (ew). Can never be too soon to kill off JGS, amirite?

As always, I really hope you enjoyed this chapter and please be sure to leave a comment

Chapter 32

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

When he gets to the end of the tunnel, he realizes he's in the main hall. The chairs and tables that had been set up during the victory celebration for the Sunshot Campaign are no longer there. The room is empty except for the throne chair that looms over the hall like an ominous shadow.

"Jiang Wan-,

"Be quiet." Jiang Cheng warns. He ducks behind the nearest column and gestures for the others to do the same. The room to the throne room has suddenly been thrown open, allowing the outside light to flood inside.

"Wei Wuxian..." Jiang Cheng breathes. He can see his brother clearly now. Jin Zixun is holding him by his hair and he drags him along, limp in his grasp. His heart thumps in his chest as he realizes he has no idea if his brother is even *alive* or not. Even from the distance, he can see that Wei Wuxian's eyes are closed, his face deathly pale. If he were alive, he'd have to be badly injured. Su She is there as well, holding a flute in his hands.

"We were right. It *was* Su She." Jiang Cheng exhales slowly. He sees Lan Wangji moving out of the corner of his eye and grabs his arm.

"Don't do anything reckless!" Jiang Cheng snaps through gritted teeth, struggling to control Zidian from activating completely. Lan Wangji doesn't respond, his eyes still fixed on Jin Zixun and Wei Wuxian. Jiang Cheng moves to grab his arm.

"If we charge in there, they could kill him. We need to make a plan, do you understand?" Lan Wangji slowly turns his head back towards him. With their eyes meeting now, Jiang Cheng can see the fear in his eyes, the intensity of it matching his own hammering heartbeat of his heart, threatening to burst from his chest any second.

"He's right, we can't attack right now...not when Su She has Wei Wuxian's life as leverage against us." Huaisang cuts in. Even in a situation like this, he seems calmer than the rest of them. "Especially against you, Lan Wangji."

"Me?" The Twin Jade looks startled. " *Why* ?"

"I...I'm suspecting this is Su Mishan's revenge against you...or just your sect in general."

"He's using Wei Ying to get to me." Lan Wangji's voice turns even colder. "Pathetic."

"I'll tap in with disciples through the talisman. They'll come in through the front."

“I’ll find a way outside,” Meng Yao says. “I’ll send a message to da-ge and er-ge and tell them to send backup.” Jiang Cheng nods at him and the man disappears back the way they came.

“He’s still alive?” Su She’s voice sounds irritated.

“We have received no orders from my uncle,” Jin Zixun replies. “I think someone must have infiltrated the palace.” He drops Wei Wuxian from his grip and stares down at him with a look of disdain on his face.

“Do we still have any use for him? Why not just let me k-”

“Not so fast...both the Lan and the Jiang sect value Wei Wuxian greatly now.”

“What does that have to do with me?” Jin Zixun retorts. “I don’t understand why uncle won’t let me kill him. He already destroyed both the yin iron and the amulet and the explosion that happened nearly killed him. He must be quite stubborn since he’s still holding on after what I did.” As he speaks, he kicks Wei Wuxian with his foot.

Finally Jiang Cheng and Lan Wangji can no longer sit still and come out from their hiding spots with their weapons raised.

“Let my brother go, you *scumbag* !

“Come to save someone?” Su She sneers. Lan Wangji’s eyes narrow. He reaches for Bichen. Jiang Cheng uncurls Zidian, getting ready to attack when he freezes.

“Wait.” He hisses at Lan Wangji. Jin Zixun has Wei Wuxian lifted up by his throat and sneers at them.

“WEI YING!” Lan Wangji screams out from next to him.

“Don’t *move* !” Jiang Cheng barks at him.

Wei Wuxian struggles in Jin Zixun’s grasp, his legs kicking weakly in the air.

If we make any sudden moves...Jin Zixun could kill him so easily.

Jiang Cheng clenches his fist, the fury and fear threatening to overwhelm him. The Jin disciples step closer.

“Sect leader Jiang. Hanguang-jun. I would think it’s best if you lower your weapons now and seal your own spiritual power.”

An arrow suddenly shoots forward and Jiang Cheng goes rigid. He watches as the arrow buries itself into Jin Zixun’s shoulders. Lan Wangji stiffens from next to him. Another arrow flies out, aiming toward Su She. The man dodges and then quickly raises his flute to blow out a note. Jin Zixun turns towards the sound and Jiang Cheng’s heart nearly jumps out of his

chest as he waits for the fierce corpse's next move. He half-expects to hear the cracking of bone, to see Wei Wuxian go completely limp.

Instead, Jin Zixun throws Wei Wuxian across the clearing as if he's a ragdoll and lunges towards their hiding spot. Jiang Cheng is ready, lashing out at Zidian with all his might. Fierce corpses start coming in from all directions, forcing Jiang Cheng and Lan Wangji to fight back to back in the center. Su She has disappeared from sight, the fucking coward. The sound of the flute is still reverberating through the air. The arrows keep coming and it's only then that Jiang Cheng notices the Jiang disciples had been hiding behind the columns on the other side of the room. The front door bursts open and more fierce corpses pour in. However, there are Jiang disciples followed closely behind them.

"Sect leader!"

"Don't talk. Keep attacking!"

The fight continues and even Wonton has joined them by barreling down Jin soldiers and fierce corpses, taking advantage of being able to stay in the air. With Jin Zixun distracted by Lan Wangji, Jiang Cheng takes the opportunity to get to Wei Wuxian, slinging his arms over his shoulders. Holding onto his brother's wrist, he starts passing him spiritual energy.

"Find Su She! Bring him alive for interrogation!" Jiang Cheng yells to the disciples."

"Yes, sect leader!"

"J..Jiang Cheng?" A weak voice rasps into his ears. Jiang Cheng looks back and sees Wei Wuxian with his eyes half-open.

"Who else?" Jiang Cheng scoffs. "Don't move around, okay?" He adds in a softer voice. "We've got you."

"Wei Ying!" Lan Wangji is at Wei Wuxian's other side in an instant. Jiang Cheng hears Wei Wuxian murmur a soft response just as two Jiang disciples run towards them.

"Da-shixiong! Is he okay?" Jiang Cheng doesn't answer them as he sets his brother down against the wall. Wei Wuxian's eyes have fluttered shut again and he doesn't rouse again even when Jiang Cheng and Lan Wangji call his name. So far, the only visible injuries Jiang Cheng can see are the bruises on his face and the reddened skin where the whip has torn the robes. He takes out a qiankun pouch holding his emergency medical kit and hands it to one of his disciples.

"Keep him safe." Jiang Cheng tells them. "We'll finish this quickly."

~

(Part of the pov is a rewind back to when WWX destroyed the amulet)

Wei Wuxian has no idea how much time has passed since the whipping began. He'd lost consciousness at some point and had been forced awake by a bucket of water. They'd tried to threaten to hurt Huaisang several times. Jin Guangshan had even tried to disciples to where Huaisang was being kept, but Wei Wuxian kept taunting them, forcing his enemies' attention on himself. Finally, Wei Wuxian had pretended to comply with reforging the amulet. He'd asked to be taken to an area with a better workspace. They take him to the back mountains and give him the tools and talisman that he requested. He draws out the array on the cave floor, aware of the many eyes that are watching him. Occasionally, the Jin disciples would ask what he is drawing and he would lie to them, knowing that they can not interpret the symbols he draws out.

When he's finally done, he places both the yin iron piece and the amulet half into the center of the array. When he activates it, the only thing he hears is the ringing in his ears and the panicked yells of the Jin disciple as the ceiling and wall start to collapse.

If this is the only way to destroy the amulet, I'll bring them down with me.

He can feel the strain on his body from the amulet's power and blood trickling from his nose, but he does his best to keep control on the resentful energy through his whistling.

Just a little further..

His vision blurs but the last thing he remembers is seeing the amulet and yin iron burst into dust and a sharp pain through his entire body before darkness sweeps over him.

....

The next time he wakes up, he's being forcibly dragged along the cold floor.

"Do what you want with him, Zixun." He hears Jin Guangshan's voice. "But don't kill him just yet..."

He already knows what's coming next and braces himself against the painful punches. A metallic taste fills his mouth.

Jin Zixun's punches are unexpectedly strong...even for a sentient fierce corpse created by just a piece of yin iron. His hatred for me must be strong enough...

The punches and kicks continue until he's lost sense of all feeling in his body. Soon, he's too weak to even lift his head. He can only move it to one side to force out the blood filling his mouth. The punches eventually stop and rough hands tie him up again before he's being dragged along the floor again into an unknown room. His senses are still hazy as he tries to make up what's happening around him. For a while, he can only hear muffled voices, and then he hears the sound of swords being sheathed and people fighting.

"Let my brother go, you scumbag!"

Jiang Cheng? Wei Wuxian tries to turn towards the noise, ignoring the throbbing pain shooting through his head. He tries to move, but everything hurt so badly. Then he feels

warm hands lift him upwards.

“Jiang Cheng?” He hears a scoff.

“Who else?” Then in a softer voice. “Don’t move around, okay? You’re safe.”

“Wei Ying.” He hears his to-be husband's voice calling to him. “Wei Ying, I’m here.” Slowly he forces his eyes open.

“Lan Zhan...”

“Wei Ying..” Wei Wuxian gives him a small smile before his eyes droop shut again.

“Keep him safe.” He hears Jiang Cheng telling the disciples before his consciousness fades away. “We will finish this quickly.”

When he opens his eyes again, he’s sitting up against a wall and there are two Jiang disciples crouching beside him and sending him spiritual energy.

“Wei-xiong! How is he?” comes Huaisang’s voice from his right side.

“He’s...not doing too well. His core was sealed while suffering all these injuries and these whip scars...it was clearly no ordinary whip. His qi is in a state of disarray, so his body isn’t accepting our energy properly. We need to get him to the healers.”

“It’s too risky sneaking him out like this. Jin Zixun is too fast...”

The spread of warmth from the spiritual energy soon brings him back to reality and he blinks hazily as he tries to make out the shapes in front of him.

“Wei-xiong...how do you feel?”

“Ugh..” Wei Wuxian moans in response, his body still aching from pain.

“Take it easy, okay? Meng Yao will come with backup soon.” Huaisang tells him before turning to the Jiang disciples. “Should we try moving him to the door?”

“The fighting is too spread out right now. Let’s move him out of this room at least.” A Jiang disciple replies.

Hands lift his arms from each side and place them around a disciple’s shoulder. They walk slowly with Huaisang keeping watch and cutting down any fierce corpse that comes their way with a flick of his fan. In the middle of the room, Wei Wuxian catches sight of his brother and fiancée fighting off the fierce corpses and Jin soldiers. He blinks in shock when he sees Hundun flying and barreling down the Jin disciples, throwing them into the wall with surprising force.

Who taught Wonton how to fight? Wei Wuxian thinks, amused. The sounds of fighting soon fade away as they move out from the main hall. However, seconds later, Jiang Cheng and Lan

Wangji come rushing out of the room followed by Jiang disciples. They force the doors closed behind them with their bodies and seal it with spiritual energy.

“Keep moving!” Jiang Cheng yells at them.

“Sect leader, what happened?”

“There’s too many of them,” Lan Wangji replies. “We were nearly trapped.”

“We need to get out of here. It’s pointless fighting inside the palace, they’re trying to corner us,” Jiang Cheng says grimly. They start moving again. Wei Wuxian can barely see what’s happening from where his head is resting on Lan Wangji’s shoulders, but he knows they’re outside the palace as an unexpected light nearly blinds him.

“Shit, they’re outside the palace too,” Jiang Cheng curses. “Should have known. Keep him here...don’t move too far away.”

“Wei Ying...I’ll be back.”

“I will stay with him,” Huaisang says. Lan Wangji and Jiang Cheng go back into battle and Wei Wuxian forces himself upwards, ignoring the prickles of pain throughout his entire body. Arms immediately help him up.

“Wei-xiong, don’t! You should sit down...you’re injured.” Huaisang urges.

At first, the only thing he can see are blurs of white and purple. The flash of blue and purple energies are followed closely by collapsing fierce corpses.

Jiang Cheng and Lan Zhan...they fight good together . Wei Wuxian thinks. What an unexpected team...I had thought Lan Zhan still held some resentment towards Jiang Cheng.

Just then, he sees Jin Zixun sneaking up behind Jiang Cheng and Lan Wangji, fists out ready to attack whoever was closest. A scene flashes in his mind of Wen Ning thrusting his fist through Jin Zixuan’s chest, an endless amount of blood spilling out from his body. He remembers Shijie lying lifeless in Jiang Cheng’s arms after being run through a sword to protect him.

...

This time, he will not let anyone he loves get hurt ever again. He’d promised himself and the people around him. His body is moving before he even registers it. One second, he’s being supported by the two Jiang disciples, barely able to stand, much less, move and the next his feet seem to be moving on their own, moving with the strength he didn’t have seconds before. He hears the disciples’ panicked shouts. But it’s too late.

And he’s too slow.

Jin Zixun had turned around at the last second.

Pain erupts through his entire body, spreading from his lower abdomen. He can feel the sudden surge of energy in his core as it tries to heal the damage. The world spins around him and his body slams against the rocks with full force. A metallic taste fills his mouth and he feels wetness on his chin. He hears Huaisang screaming his name with a voice full of terror that he's never heard from his friend before. Jiang Cheng and Lan Wangji are calling him as well. Hands pressed against his stomach, trying to staunch the blood loss.

“Wei Ying...my love...please don't leave me!”

“ *Wei Wuxian!* ” He sees another purple blur next to him. His brother sounds frantic.

“I'm sorry...” He manages to wheeze out before darkness welcomes him like an old friend.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoyed this chapter :DD

runs away

Chapter 33

Chapter Notes

Have a rare NHS POV this chapter (part of it) :DD

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Nie Huaisang has never felt so scared in his life, not since he saw his brother qi deviate in front of him. He's frozen in fear and shock as he hears the sickening crunch of flesh and bone and the hollow thud of his best friend's body as he's thrown against the rocks. Huaisang gets there first while Jiang Cheng and Lan Wangji drive back Jin Zixun. Huaisang starts pushing as much spiritual energy as he can into his friend's wound to try and stop the bleeding. The two Jiang disciples from before are next to him in an instant. One of them takes off their outer robes to bundle it up against the wound.

"We need to get him to Lady Wen immediately. He's losing too much blood." One of the disciples exclaims, her voice thick with panic. Huaisang looks around frantically for help, but the only thing he can see is the resounding crack of Zidian and the strum of a guqin. Jiang Cheng has Zidian wrapped around Jin Zixun's body, his face contorted with fury. At his side, Lan Wangji is ready, Bichen raised up to Jin Zixun's throat, his face with an equally cold and deadly expression. The deed is done quickly as Bichen flashes and Zixun's head rolls onto the ground. Then the two of them are at his side in a blink, helping to pass Wei Wuxian energy.

"Wei Wuxian...please wake up. You can't do this to me..." Jiang Cheng sounds so vulnerable. The last time Huaisang had heard him sound like this was in Guanyin Temple after the truth of his core had been revealed to him. \

Jiang-xiong could lose his brother again and I..I could lose my best friend again.

Not many people know. That he had to grieve Wei Wuxian as well as his brother as well. Nobody knew that he knew about his friend's golden core the day he came back missing after all those three months.

"Jiang-xiong!" Huaisang shakes the other man's shoulders. "Get him to Unclean Realm immediately! There isn't a moment to waste."

Jiang Cheng only spares him a brief glance before he sweeps Wei Wuxian into his arms, taking flight immediately. Lan Wangji is right behind him. Movement catches Huaisang's eyes, but before he can go towards it, the Jiang disciples beat him to it and throw someone into the clearing. It takes Huaisang only a second to realize who it is.

"You!" Something in Huaisang snaps as he looms over Su She's cowering form. "Wei-xiong saved your life! How *dare* you!!"

Su She tries to act brave and attack even in the situation he is in, but he quickly realizes he's way outnumbered.

"Huaisang!" he turns in relief hearing his older brother's voice.

"Da-ge!" The strong facade he'd been holding onto finally breaks as he throws himself into his brother's arms, burying his face into the other's broad shoulders. For the first time in years, his vulnerability is genuine.

"What happened here? Are you hurt? Did that scum Su She do anything to you?" As he speaks, Huaisang can *feel* the menace coming off from his brother.

"N-no," Su She gulps. He tries scrambling away, but the Jiang and Nie disciples quickly surround him with their swords pointed towards his throat.

"Da-ge..Wei-xiong..." Huaisang lifts his tear-streaked face upwards. "He was badly wounded...Da-ge, please. I'm not hurt but he's..."

"I've already sent them, Huaisang." His brother soothes him. "Young Master Wei is strong... he will be fine."

"But Da-ge, without his core...will he be okay? There was...there was so much blood.."

"Doctor Wen Qing is the best doctor of this generation," His brother says, clasping his hand firmly on his shoulders. "He will be fine."

Huaisang can't bring himself to be convinced. Wei Wuxian's injuries when they found him had been far from small. The cries of pain that had echoed throughout the dungeon still haunt his mind. He hated feeling powerless to help his friend at that moment when he had already gone to such lengths to try and save his brother. In this timeline, he had even learned to cultivate with the fan to try and protect himself in ways that didn't involve scheming and planning behind the scenes despite that being his main strength.

"Huaisang...I'm sorry." Meng Yao looks upset as he approaches him. "I should have been quicker..."

Huaisang sneaks a look at him and shakes his head. "It is not your fault. We still have the other men to capture." He looks over to where the Nie and Jiang disciples are rounding up the Jin disciples who had been on Jin Guangshan's side. Luo Qingyang is there too with her own group of Jin disciples, pulling along both Jin and Su disciples who have their arms bound behind their backs with spiritual-energy-suppressing rope.

"Sect leader, we have Su She apprehended. What should we do now?" A Nie disciple calls.

"Any sign of that Jin Guangshan?" Nie Mingjue calls back.

"Da-ge..he's dead," Huaisang tells him. "Jiang-xiong and Lan-xiong killed him." For a second, Nie Mingjue looks startled before his expression changes to grim satisfaction.

“Good. I only wished I had been there to see it.” He says. “And I’m sure no sect will complain about it. The trial would have been useless anyways.”

“And Su She? He will be executed too?” Huaisang asks.

“Of course, he will. Public execution for him.” Nie Mingjue sneers at the cowering man on the ground. “You were so desperate for attention so you will get the attention.

“I recommend we cremate the body.” MianMian has joined them and is gesturing to Jin Zixun’s headless body. “Who knows if some creep ends up raising his corpse again? A headless one no less.”

“Let’s do that,” Nie Mingjue agrees.

“Da-ge...can we hurry back?” Huaisang tugs at his sleeve. He needs to make sure his friend is okay. As he says this, he feels a huge nudge at his feet and jumps, startled.

“Wonton? You’re still here?” Huaisang swings his leg over the creature as it continues to nudge him and yelps as it suddenly takes off. He quickly wraps his arms around the underbelly of the winged creature and ends up hanging on to dear life as it flies towards Unclean Realm. The second he gets off Wonton, he vomits into the nearest bush and shakes his head wearily. Nie Zonghui shoots him an amused look as he gets off his sword.

“A-Sang, are you alright?” Yanli rushes up to him, looking worried.

“I am fine, Yanli-jie. Wei-xiong...”

“A-Qing and A-Cheng are with him along with the other healers.” She swallows hard and wipes at her eyes, which are red and puffy.

“A-Li...Wei Wuxian is strong. He will get through this. Don’t cry.” Her husband is at her side in an instant, wrapping his arms around her. He turns to look at Huaisang with a questioning expression. “My father?”

“Is dead.” Huaisang doesn’t care about how blunt he sounds. He feels nothing but delight at the fact that the man who hurt and *tortured* his best friend is dead.

“Good.” Yanli’s eyes flash with anger and satisfaction. Huaisang is suddenly reminded that she is the daughter of the Violet Spider. She is not just the sweet and kind woman who’d make soup for him and praised his drawings and paintings, but the daughter of the former Jiang matriarch. He’s escorted into his room where a healer quickly checks him over with injuries. Yanli pushes a warm cup of tea into his hands. He doesn’t remember falling asleep

~

“Wei Wuxian!” Jiang Cheng tries frantically to wake his brother up again to no avail. There’s too much blood. For one moment, he’s brought back to that horrible night in Nightless City, watching the light die out from his sister’s eyes as she’s stabbed through the heart.

“Jiang-xiong! Get him to Unclean Realm immediately! There isn’t a moment to waste.” Jiang Cheng immediately scoops his brother into his arms and takes off.

“Wei Ying!” Lan Wangji is flying at Jiang Cheng’s side, still trying to pass Wei Wuxian spiritual energy.

“Save it for later! We don’t want you falling off your sword!” Jiang Cheng snaps at him as he pushes every ounce of energy from his core into the sword. He keeps one of his fingers close to the pulse point on the other’s neck. They’ve barely reached the border of Qinghe when the shallow breaths against the crook of his neck suddenly stop. Jiang Cheng nearly falls off his sword in shock. The pulse is still there but steadily weakening. He speeds on ahead with a sudden burst of energy, ignoring Lan Wangji who calls out to him in surprise.

He lands in the courtyard of Unclean Realm, startling a few disciples who are guarding the courtyard. They take one look at Wei Wuxian’s limp form and immediately start yelling for Wen Qing and the Nie healers.

“Jiang Cheng! What happened? Lay him down here.” Wen Qing’s cool and commanding voice seems to soothe some of the anxiety and fear in his heart. Wen Ning is at her side in an instant, waiting for her instructions.

“Wen Qing, he’s...he’s not breathing, and his heart...” Jiang Cheng tells her. Next to him, Lan Wangji lets out a choking sound. Wen Qing immediately grabs Wei Wuxian’s wrist to check for herself. Her eyes suddenly widen and he’s suddenly pushed aside as she leans over Wei Wuxian, her hands rubbing back and forth against his chest rigorously.

“We-,” Jiang Cheng begins, but stops when he realizes what’s happening. Wen Qing is trying to restart his brother’s *heart* .

“His heart just gave out!” Wen Qing exclaims, confirming his fear. “His body must have gone into shock...all those injuries were too much!”

Next to him, Lan Wangji screams out Wei Wuxian’s birth name, but Jiang Cheng pays no mind to it. Instead, he crouches down next to Wei Wuxian’s other side and grabs Wei Wuxian’s hand with his right hand, the one with Zidian on it.

Go. Curl around him. He orders it. The spiritual weapon seems to hesitate for a while before obeying, wrapping itself around Wei Wuxian’s chest. Wen Qing stares at the snake-like weapon in alarm.

“Jiang Cheng! What are you-,”

Jiang Cheng ignores them and proceeds to send a strong surge of spiritual energy through the whip. Wen Qing jerks back in shock as Wei Wuxian’s body spasms under the whip. Then she quickly recovers and places a hand on Wei Wuxian’s chest again.

“I think you did something...” She says quietly.

“Zidian restarted his heart?” Wen Ning says in awe.

“A-Ning, focus.” Wen Qing is already back in concentration mode, working to press herbs onto the wound on Wei Wuxian’s abdomen.

“Lan Wangji, I know you want to help, so be on standby. Pass Jiang Cheng energy when I tell you to.” She works in silence, her hands moving meticulously and carefully. Even when her fingers are covered in blood, her expression remains calm. Meanwhile, Jiang Cheng is barely maintaining his composure, the only thing keeping him grounded is the pulse against his fingers and he rests them against his brother’s wrists. It’s a lot more steady now after Wen Qing’s work, but does little to help him recover from the terror that had threatened to swallow him up whole earlier on.

(Flashback)

He had not noticed Wei Wuxian. He had been prepared to knock away Jin Zixun with Zidian but somehow Wei Wuxian appeared. He had moved so quickly, much faster than what his injuries would have allowed this body to move. He hears Huaisang screaming followed by a sickening crunch, then all he sees is red.

No! Please..not again!

For a moment, he’s thrown back to that tragic night; he’s holding his sister’s bloodsoaked body close to his chest, and his brother falls off a cliff with a haunting smile on his face.

Zidian reacts before he does, snaking its way towards Jin Zixun and wrapping itself around his throat. Lan Wangji quickly joins him with attacks of his own. It’s over in seconds. Jiang Cheng rushes to his brother’s side where Huaisang is already passing him spiritual energy. It takes Huaisang’s frantic shaking of his shoulders to snap him out of his daze and overwhelming panic.

(end flashback)

“Is his core okay?” Jiang Cheng asks. The area of the wound looks far too close to the dantian for comfort. He instinctively reaches to feel his brother’s core. Wen Qing’s expression shifts and Jiang Cheng stiffens.

“Resentment...” She says quietly. “We need to cleanse it. It’s preventing his wounds from healing properly.” She gestures to where the bandages on his abdomen are still seeping red.

“I will play ‘Cleansing’ for him.” Lan Wangji cuts in, already moving his hands away from Jiang Cheng’s shoulder and taking his guqin out. The playing goes on for another shichen before Wen Qing finally moves her hands away from Wei Wuxian.

“He’s stable for now.” She tells them. “You should get some rest.”

When neither Jiang Cheng nor Lan Wangji moves, she sighs, “Do not worry. His pulse and heartbeat is normal. What happened earlier...will not happen again.”

Jiang Cheng only nods numbly and moves to stand, but almost immediately his legs give out from under him. Hands immediately grab his shoulders, supporting him.

“Sect leader Jiang!” He hears Wen Ning’s concerned voice as he blinks the dizziness away.

“Jiang Cheng!” Wen Qing calls his name. He feels her taking his wrist and she lets out a hiss of alarm.

“Just how much energy did you give him? You nearly drained your own core!”

He doesn’t protest as she pushes him down onto another bed.

“You too, Lan Wangji.”

Jiang Cheng finally feels exhaustion wash over him as his eyelids begin to droop. Halfway through the night, he wakes up in panic from a nightmare, the copper smell of blood still lingering even when he is awake. He slips out from his bed and moves to crouch next to his brother, taking one of his hands between his two palms. The hand feels cold despite how warm the blanket is.

“Wei Wuxian,” he whispers quietly. “You have to wake up, okay? You can’t make A-jie cry and our nephew... You still need to meet him. Didn’t you say you wanted to meet him this time?” He lets the tears slip down his cheeks. “You can’t leave us...not after everything we’ve been through. So please...A-Xian...you have to get through this.”

He falls asleep like that at his brother’s bedside.

When he wakes up again, it’s to his sister’s gentle voice.

“A-jie...” He sits up. His knees are sore from sleeping at Wei Wuxian’s bedside.

“Shh..A-Cheng, take it easy, okay?”

“A-jie...” The calm demeanor he’d been holding on to finally breaks as he buries his face into her shoulders.

“A-Cheng...do not worry too much, okay? A-Xian is strong, you know he is.”

“I..I couldn’t protect him...” Jiang Cheng trembles. The mission was supposed to be for rescuing his *brother*, why was it he who got saved instead? Why was Wei Wuxian the one who nearly died protecting him?

“But you did...Wen Qing told me what you did.” Her hands move to touch Zidian. “I had no idea you could do that...”

“Mother did it once. I remembered.” Jiang Cheng replies. He looks around and is surprised to see that Lan Wangji isn’t in the infirmary. Then his eyes move over to where his brother

lay in the other bed. “How is he?”

Wen Qing’s voice answers him. “His condition has been the same since you fell asleep. No big changes. His pulse is still a bit weak, but it’s steady. A-Ning has been keeping an eye on it.”

“What about spiritual energy?” Jiang Cheng stands up with shaky legs.

“Take it easy,” Wen Qing tells him. “Huaisang helped with that and even Chifeng-zun contributed.”

“Huaisang?” Jiang Cheng blinks. He slightly recalls his friend sending his brother energy when they had first gotten to him.

“Wen Qing...may I speak with you in private?”

She looks at him in surprise but nods. They leave the infirmary together to go to the room that had been prepared for Jiang Cheng. They sit down at the table and Jiang Cheng pours them tea.

“I just have something big to tell you. It may be hard to believe, but I need you to hear me out.”

She stares at him for a long time and nods.

He tells her everything, including the disasters that had happened in the previous timeline. He catches her expression of horror when he tells her about the death of her brother and then her family with A-Yuan being the only survivor. He also mentions, with difficulty, the death of his own siblings.

“My brother and I made a promise to be more open with one another and to protect the people we couldn’t protect back then. Taking you and your family in was something we both wanted to do. “ Jiang Cheng takes a deep shuddering breath. “Back then, I was young and inexperienced. I couldn’t risk protecting you and having Jin Guangshan turn on my sect. He manipulated me.”

“I understand,” Wen Qing says quietly. “I had to stay silent about the war to protect my own family. I *understand* choosing your own family over...possible strangers.”

You were never a stranger, Wen Qing. I just...

“I...this time...I thought I could protect him but...” Jiang Cheng breaks off as his breathing shudders, his eye squeezing shut as he’s unable to get the image of his brother going limp in his arms, blood pooling from under him soaking both their robes out of his head.

“Jiang Cheng, do not blame yourself. He chose to protect you.” Jiang Cheng lets out a frustrated noise.

“Of course he did. He’s always...been like this. Even if I try to protect him, he’d always find a way to take the blow for me. He let himself be cut open so he could give his core to me...”

This time, I tried to do more to protect him yet...”

“You *did* protect him. You didn’t fail.”

“But-,”

“You already got this far.” Wen Qing reaches a hand towards him. “Do not dismiss the efforts you made simply because of one mistake.” She lets out a soft sigh. “You told me how you lost your core. You made the ultimate sacrifice and so did he. Besides, you know Wei Wuxian’s personality too well. He will always be stubborn and self-sacrificing in your eyes, won’t he?”

“I was hoping he would *change* his ways,” Jiang Cheng grumbles lightly, but he cups his hands over both of theirs and squeezes them. “But...thank you...I understand what you mean. I know that if I were in his place, I would have done the same. Even A-jie. In this family...I’m afraid we all have this trait. It can not be easily changed.”

“Good.” Wen Qing tells him, looking him firmly in the eyes. “Having a family where everyone protects one another... is the kind of family everyone should. But...” She frowns slightly. “For Wei Wuxian...you should tell that idiot to think about himself more for everyone’s sake. Is it a normal trait in this family to try and throw your life away so easily? I understand wanting to protect one another, but please try not to die doing so. You complain about Wei Wuxian but from what you’ve told me, you and your sister aren’t innocent of being reckless either.”

Jiang Cheng smiles lightly. “I promise we’ll be better with that.”

“Good.” Wen Qing smiles in satisfaction. “See that you will.”

Chapter End Notes

The idea of JC using Zidian as a defibrillator is something I came up with on the whim. It was random and wild, but it worked out. I hope you liked it too :DD (it’ll be explained how he did it another chapter)

Chapter 34

Chapter Notes

We're almost to the end!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“How is he doing?” Jiang Cheng hovers over Wen Qing the next day as she checks Wei Wuxian over. Yanli, Lan Wangji, Xichen and even Lan Qiren are standing on one side of the room.

“Most of his more minor injuries are healing fine,” Wen Qing tells him. “The whip marks... there’s no issue with it, but they’ll leave scars.” She finishes replacing the bandages and turns to face the crowd. “The disciple whip of the Wen Clan isn’t just any ordinary whip. I’ve treated enough victims of Wen Ruohan to know the effect it has on one’s body.”

“Is it...bad?” Yanli asks anxiously, moving to sit on the edge of Wei Wuxian’s bed. “A-Xian’s core isn’t strong...”

The rest of the people look sharply at Wen Qing, waiting for her to continue.

“The Wen Clan’s discipline whip targets one’s meridians and core. Some victims have had their cores permanently damaged to the point where it was useless.”

“Wen Qing,” Jiang Cheng begins. Lan Wangji steps closer to the bed, the fear evident in his eyes. Jiang Cheng’s own heart is thumping in his chest.

“Having a core there but knowing it will be useless.” Xichen shudders while Lan Qiren has his eyes closed while he strokes his beard. Yanli looks deeply troubled.

“He’ll be alright,” Wen Qing reassures them. “As I said before, I’ve treated victims of the discipline whip before. However, it seems like Jin Guangshan did not know how to wield its full power. The patients I’ve treated before had far worse whip lashes and for Wei Wuxian’s, it only had slight interference with his spiritual energy. His body will just take a little longer to heal and he should not use Suibian for at least three months.”

“Why wouldn’t his core be strong? It’s already been at least a year.” Lan Qiren frowns. “I would think it would have healed by now.”

“That...” Jiang Cheng exchanges a look with his sister. “I’m afraid it’s complicated. I can explain what happened once my brother awakes...and if he agrees with it.”

Nie Mingjue gives him a curious look but doesn’t pry further for answers. They leave the room and head to the main hall to settle down for lunch.

“Well, now that we have assurance Young Master Wei will heal,” Xichen says. “There’s an emergency discussion conference that will be held soon. I think it would be appropriate for it to be held in Yunmeng.”

“I’d like to wait for my brother to wake up first,” Jiang Cheng replies. Lan Xichen nods in understanding.

“That would be appropriate.”

“Xichen, you and your brother may stay if you wish.” Nie Mingjue tells him. “I know Wangji will not leave Young master’s Wei side until he awakens.”

“Chifeng-zun, my disciples will arrive with A-Yuan and Mo Xuanyu soon. A-Yuan has been very anxious with the absence of his family.”

“Mo Xuanyu?” Jin Zixuan echoes as he walks up to them. Jin Guangyao is at his side. “My half brother?”

“I did tell you about it, didn’t I, A-Xuan?” Jiang Yanli says. “He’s at Lotus Pier right now with his mother.”

“Oh right.” Jin Zixuan nods. He swallows. “I should have done something sooner...like officialize him into the family.”

“There is plenty of time for that,” Jiang Yanli cuts in gently. “You will have your chance to introduce yourself as his big brother.”

The group of Jiang disciples arrive shortly before everyone is finished eating.

“Jiang-shushu!” A-Yuan breaks away from the group to crash into his legs.

“A-Yuan, did you behave while I was away?” Jiang Cheng scoops him into his arms. The boy is a lot heavier than when he first came to Lotus Pier.

“Mn! Mo-gege and I peeled lotus seeds and caught frogs. Does shushu wanna see?”

“Frogs? You brought them with you?” Jiang Cheng looks down and to his surprise, A-Yuan brings out a frog he’d hidden inside his robes.

“Frogs are hard to catch.” Jiang Cheng smiles softly, remembering the times when he and Wei Wuxian would spend hours crouching by the pond just to catch a single frog. He ruffles the boy’s hair. “Good job.”

“Can A-Yuan keep the frog forever?”

Jiang Cheng looks down at the child who’s staring at him with pleading round eyes. He shakes his head lightly.

“The frog has a home. He lives in the pond. He probably has family there. You wouldn’t want to separate him from them, right?”

“No.” A-Yuan shakes his head. He looks down at the frog then back at Jiang Cheng.

“Hold onto him until we get back to Lotus Pier. Then we will set him free, okay?”

“Okay.” A-Yuan beams at him then he starts looking around. “Shushu, where is A-Niang and Baba?”

“A-Niang?” Jiang Cheng blinks.

“Xian-gege. A-Niang,” A-Yuan explains.

“A-Yuan.” Lan Wangji steps into the courtyard and Jiang Cheng immediately sets the boy down before he can wiggle out of his arms.

“Xian-gege?”

Lan Wangji exchanges a look with Jiang Cheng.

“Your Xian-gege is resting right now. Something...happened.” Lan Wangji looks uncertainly at the boy as if he’s deciding his words carefully.

“He is sleeping,” Jiang Cheng interrupts, shooting Lan Wangji a warning look. “He may not wake up for a while. I can take you to go see him as long as you don’t disturb him, okay?”

“Okay!”

Wen Qing gives them both a look with pursed lips as they step into the room but she doesn’t protest as A-Yuan is led closer to the bed.

“Wonton!” A-Yuan points to the hundun which is sleeping on the floor next to the bed. Before anyone can stop him, the boy runs over to the creature and climbs on top of him. The hundun lets out a low huff and flaps its wings lazily. A-Yuan peers curiously over the bed, his head barely going over it as he tries to get a glimpse of Wei Wuxian.

“Xian-gege...hurt?” The boy’s voice suddenly becomes very small and he shrink back again his aunt’s leg.

“He will be fine.” Wen Qing crouches down next to him and runs a hand over his hair. “Your gege is strong.”

“He won’t leave like jiejie?” A-Yuan’s eyes are teary.

“No.” Jiang Cheng crouches down as well. “He will be fine. He needs to sleep to recover since he is very tired. He will wake up soon, I promise.”

Soon, the boy falls asleep by Wei Wuxian’s bedside and Wen Ning comes to bring him back to his room.

“How is he, really?” Jiang Cheng presses. He knows Wen Qing had omitted certain details about Wei Wuxian’s condition due to his golden core.

“There’s no signs of infection.” Wen Qing tells him. “For now.”

“His core...if mine can help,” Jiang Cheng begins.

“There shouldn’t be anything to worry about,” Wen Qing reassures him. “I don’t know what Zidian did, but it gave his core an additional energy boost.”

“Oh.” Jiang Cheng blinks down at the spiritual weapon on his hand. “In the past...Zidian had only been used to cause him harm. To think that it would help him one day...”

“You are the new owner of Zidian now. It will follow your will.” Wen Qing places a hand over his own. “The energy from Zidian was absorbed into his core which is why his healing has been sped up.”

“Does it have anything to do with m-, I mean... *his* core.”

“It is true that the energy from his original core would have helped.” Wen Qing nods. “But it is your core that helped him. Not his own.”

“My...core?” Jiang Cheng looks away. Ever since he found out the truth, he’d had trouble coming to terms that the core was ever even his in the first place. Even now, he could not accept such a fact.

“The core is yours.” Wen Qing says. “You’ve made it yours. Last time...you told me how you rebuilt Lotus Pier. That was you alone.” Wen Qing continues. “Yes, Wei Wuxian’s core was with you, but did you really think that was the only thing that helped to rebuild what you did during all those years? Your skills came from yourself as you grew over the years, not from a core.”

“I...” Jiang Cheng is lost for words. The truth is, that *was* what he had thought.

“Have more faith in yourself. Out of the two of you, only you are talented and capable enough of being the sect leader.”

“Wei Wuxian told me this too,” Jiang Cheng says. “It’s just that...”

“You are more than just a cultivator, you know?” Wen Qing leans in closer. “You are a brother first and foremost. Someone who cares deeply for his family. Someone who was willing to lead those guards away from Wei Wuxian so he wouldn’t get caught. You didn’t hesitate to want to give up your life for him. Your strengths are with you regardless of whether you are a cultivator or just a normal person.

“Thank you.” Jiang Cheng whispers. Wen Qing scoffs and kisses him lightly on the cheeks.

“Do not thank me. Just stop degrading yourself, okay? Look at how far you’ve come. Now you should rest more.”

“*You* should rest more,” Jiang Cheng argues. “A-jie and I can watch over him. And there are many sect healers around in case anything happens.”

“Okay.” Wen Qng smiles warmly at him. “I will go.”

Jiang Cheng follows her to their shared guest room and helps her to lie down on the bed, slipping incense powder into incense burner before leaving the room.

~

Wei Wuxian slowly slips back into consciousness. He blinks a few times to adjust to the brightness of the room before looking around.

“Wei Ying.” His fiancé’s face comes into view. “Wei Ying.”

“Lan Zhan,” he murmurs. “I’ve missed you. I...what happened?”

“Jin Zixun. Your wounds were deep. I thought...” Lan Wangji breaks off with a choking noise and Wei Wuxian reaches forward to squeeze his hands.

“Lan Zhan...I’m right here, aren’t I? I’m not going anywhere. We still need to get married... bring A-Yuan to Cloud Recesses. To our *home* .”

“Mn.”

“I promised.”

“Mn.” Lan Wangji smiles softly at him and leans down for a kiss when the door suddenly slides open and he jerks back.

“You’re awake.” Jiang Cheng steps into the room, holding a tray with a bowl on top of it. He casts a suspicious look over at Lan Wangji before setting the tray down onto the table.

“Of course..you really think I’d let Jin Zixun of all people get the best of me?” Wei Wuxian forces out a weak smile.

“Quit making jokes!” Jiang Cheng snaps, his eyes shining. “You nearly died. Your heart *stopped* ! Wen Qing had to restart it.” Wei Wuxian’s smile drop slightly but he tries not to show it.

“Jin Zixun just loved making trouble for me in both timelines, didn’t he? Even if he was technically already dead this time...” he tries to laugh it off but Jiang Cheng sends him a hard glare.

“Wei Ying. Do not joke.” He feels a hard squeeze on his hand.

“Ahaha.” Wei Wuxian laughs nervously.

“It was not me,” Wen Qing’s voice cuts through the room. “A-Cheng, don’t let me take all the credit.”

“For what?” Wei Wuxian blinks at her.

“Restarting your heart,” Lan Wangji replies. “Sect leader Jiang used Zidian.”

“So...that dream about Zidian shocking me wasn’t really a dream?” Wei Wuxian laughs nervously. “I thought it was Madame Yu trying to punish me...I thought I was-,” He breaks off as he sees his zhiji frown deeply.

Dying...

“Zidian? To start my heart? How?”

“I saw my mother use a similar method,” Jiang Chng explains. “One of our shidis nearly drowned. A senior disciple rescued him and got all the water out. He even tried using heart massage, but it didn’t work. So my mother used Zidian. Ultimately, it was the spiritual energy that helped to restart his heart. It works as long as the user is controlling the amount of energy going through the whip.

“Oh, I remember this! But I didn’t think you would ever have to use it, Jiang Cheng.”

“Well...it came in handy, didn’t it?” Jiang Cheng crosses his arms over his chest.

“Ah, yes.” Wei Wuxian smiles. “Thank you.”

“Well.” Jiang Cheng turns away, his face slightly pink. “Just don’t go dying every time we take our eyes off you, okay?”

“Ah.” Wei Wuxian smiles sheepishly. “Well...my legs kind of moved on their own? Can you blame me for reacting like that?”

“We were handling it just fine!” Jiang Cheng glares at him. “Who told you to move, huh?”

“Aiya, Jiang Cheng!” Wei Wuxian throws off his blanket with the intent of walking over to his brother.

“Move from that bed and I’ll break your legs.” Jiang Cheng points his fingers at him.

“Jiang Cheng,” Wei Wuxian whines. “How could you threaten your already injured brother? Don’t you think I have enough broken bones?”

“Seeing how you’re well enough to be running your mouth off, you’re clearly not injured enough!”

“Jiang-xiong, give him a break! He just woke up!”

“Nie-xiong!” Wei Wuxian turns in delight as his other sworn brother walks in. Nie Huaisang walks straight over to the bed and wacks him hard on the head with his fan.

“Ow!” Wei Wuxian hisses, rubbing the spot with his hand. “Nie-xiong, what was that for?”

“For nearly dying!” Nie Huaisang wags the fan at him as if he’s scolding a child. “You scared me half to death! And Da-ge, he was worried about you too!”

“I expected this treatment from Jiang Cheng, but not from you,” Wei Wuxian whines.

“A-Xian.” Yanli is next to come into the room. “How do you feel?”

“Jiejie!” Wei Wuxian sits up even further. “I feel...hungry. For Jiejie’s lotus roots and ribs soup.”

“Then I will make you some.” Yanli smiles. “I am so glad you’re okay. I was worried. We all were.” She sets her hand briefly on Wei Wuxian’s head before leaving the room again.

“What happened while I was unconscious?” Wei Wuxian turns towards Wen Qing. “How long have I been asleep?”

“A week.” Wen Qing answers him. “And nothing happened, really. Jin Zixun is dead though...well permanently dead and not to be risen again.” She clears her throat loudly. “Now, everyone out while I check over my patient! Everyone except A-Cheng.”

Next to Wei Wuxian, Lan Wangji lets out a noise of protest. Wen Qing sighs in exasperation. “Fine, Wangji will stay too. But Huaisang, please leave.”

Huaisang sighs and hits Wei Wuxian’s arm lightly one last time before leaving the room, closing the door behind him.

“A-Cheng, huh?” Wei Wuxian smirks over at Jiang Cheng. “Since when?”

“Why does that matter?” Jiang Cheng’s face flushes.

“It seems like a lot *did* happen while I was unconscious. Qing-jie, why don’t you tell me more details, huh?”

“There’s nothing to know.” Wen Qing gives him a sharp look. “Now stop moving.”

Wei Wuxian stays still as Wen Qing checks him over. Next to him, Jiang Cheng and Lan Wangji hover nearby, seemingly watching her every movement.

“You’re definitely healing faster than a normal person would,” Wen Qing tells them once she’s done. “I told this to A-Cheng already, but Zidian seemed to have given your core an additional boost. Not just that, but I can sense that its energy lingered in your body and was absorbed into the core itself.”

“Wait,” Wei Wuxian whispers. “Zidian’s energy is a part of my core?”

“That appears to be the case, yes.”

Wei Wuxian glances over at Jiang Cheng whose expression is calm.

“So...what would that mean?” Wei Wuxian questions.

“It’s not a bad thing, Wei Wuxian. Zidian’s energy is strong. It will definitely help with the process of your core.”

“Yes, I know it wouldn’t be a bad thing. It’s just that...something like that has never happened before, right? I’m still shocked.”

“No it has not. But I haven’t heard of a spiritual whip restarting people’s heart either.” Wen Qing lets out a low huff of amusement. “But now that you’re awake, I’ll bring A-Yuan to see you. He’s been anxiously hovering near you this entire time.”

“A-jie.” Wen Ning, who’s been standing near the side of the room this entire time speaks up. “I will bring him.”

“Ah no need, he is here now. Look.” Wen Qing gestures towards the door.

“A-Xian, I’ve brought your soup.” Yanli returns to the room with a tray holding five bowls. A-Yuan is right behind her.

“Xian-gege!” The boy runs towards Wei Wuxian and hugs him tightly, but all the while carefully avoiding the bandages that stick out from his half-opened robes.

“A-Yuan, my little lotus! Have you behaved?”

“A-Yuan always behave!”

Wei Wuxian laughs and reaches to pick him up but Wen Qing slaps him lightly on the shoulders.

“Don’t you dare.” She scolds him. “A-Yuan, you’re big enough to climb onto the bed yourself, aren’t you?”

“Mn!” A-Yuan puts one leg on the bed, then the other until he’s sitting on Wei Wuxian’s blanket.

“I’ll reheat your medicine.” Wen Qing says, picking up the tray that Jiang Cheng had brought in earlier. “Drink the soup first. Don’t have the medicine on an empty stomach.”

“A-jie. Is that one for A-Yuan?” Wei Wuxian notices there’s a fifth bowl on the tray.

“Yanli-aiyi’s soup!” A-Yuan says excitedly.

“Eat slowly now.” Yanli moves to feed the boy, carefully spooning the soup into his mouth.

“Jiang Cheng-,” Wei Wuxian begins.

“No.” Jiang Cheng immediately turns away. “Feed yourself.”

“I will feed Wei Ying.” Lan Wangji picks up one of the bowls. He scoops some warm liquid with the soup, blows on it, and holds it close to Wei Wuxian’s mouth.

“My husband is the best!” Wei Wuxian exclaims once he’s swallowed the first spoonful. Jiang Cheng lets out groan from the table.

“Can you two not do this while we’re all eating?”

“Feed me more, Lan-er gege.” Wei Wuxian begs, ignoring his brother completely.

“Mn. Will feed Wei Ying.”

Chapter End Notes

Apparently having an 8-hour work day four days a week fried my writing braincells, hence why this chapter is so late and relatively not very exciting. I hope you like what I did with Zidian not only helping to restart WWX's heart, but also helping with his core!

Next chapter is the last chapter so you all should know what that means ;)

Next chapter spoiler: Weddings (yes it is plural) and another big announcement

Can you guess the announcement? :D

As always, please be sure to comment below on what you think of the chapter!

Chapter 35

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Will you stop squirming? Do you need me to paralyze you with needles?”

Wei Wuxian lets out a huff as Jiang Cheng mercilessly tugs at the measuring tape wrapped around his waist.

“And where would you have gotten the needles from?”

“Not where. Who.” Jiang Cheng corrects him. “And you can think that out yourself, can’t you? Did you permanently lose your brain cells and never recover them from last time?”

“So harsh!” Wei Wuxian whines. “Did Qing-jie really give you needles? How come?”

“Why else? To force you to behave. She told me it was efficient.” He pauses. “She was right.”

“Shijie! Jiang Cheng is bullying me!” Wei Wuxian lets out a small yelp as Jiang Cheng pinches him in the arm.

“Don’t bother calling for her. She’s out at the marketplace with Wen Qing and Wen Ning.”

“Are we planning double weddings?” Wei Wuxian gasps.

“Of course not, you idiot! That’s not appropriate!”

“Young Master Wei.” A voice comes from the door. “You have several packages from Gusu.”

“Packages? Lan Zhan must have sent gifts!” Wei Wuxian reaches to touch the silver hairpin on his head.

“More gifts?” Jiang Cheng sighs in exasperation. “Where did Gusu get all that money from?”

“Well...” Wei Wuxian snickers. “Jin Guangshan’s personal treasury was distributed by Pea-, Sect leader Jin himself. He gave plenty of it to the Jiang sect as well. How else do you think the Lans were able to offer the bride price?”

“Oh right.” Jiang Cheng rolls his eyes. “Anyways, we’re done here. I’ll have someone bring out the measurements to the tailor.”

Wei Wuxian jumps up, eager to stop sitting around.

“Spar with me!”

“Why?” Jiang Cheng scowls at him. “Didn’t Wen Qing tell you to take it easy?”

“Not with Suibian.” Wei Wuxian sighs. His core had been growing at a steadier rate ever since he was told that *Zidian’s energy* is a literal part of his core now. It had taken only two weeks for his injuries to fully recover.

“If you want to use Suibian, I think you are ready.”

Wei Wuxian spins around so fast he nearly loses balance.

“Qing-jie! You mean it?” His voice trembles. “I’m really ready?”

“Yes.” Her voice is steady.

“I...” His eyes drift over to where Suibian is propped up against the wall. Something in his core stirs as if the sword’s spirit is *calling* for him.

“A-Xian...” His sister smiles at him with glistening eyes. Wei Wuxian swallows and exchanges a look with Jiang Cheng who has a myriad of emotions on his face.

“Let’s go outside for this.” He picks up Suibian, running his hands over the hilt.

“Did you want to invite Lan Wangji?”

“Hmm. I should surprise him.” Wei Wuxian smiles. Besides, he wants this special moment to be with the family he grew up with. He knows that this meant as much to him as it meant to Jiang Cheng. Sneaking a glance at him, Wei Wuxian can see his brother hiding his face.

“Aw, Jiang Cheng.” Wei Wuxian reaches over to pull him close, his own eyes filling with tears.

“Shut up!” Jiang Cheng doesn’t push him away.

“I can’t wait to spar with you again. And knock you flat on your ass!”

“Oh, you just wait and see who’s going to get knocked on their ass. Now get off me!”

They break apart and Wei Wuxian reaches for the sword on his belt again. Even within the sheathe, he can feel its energy humming. In the past, if he had even been *near* the sword, it would hurt so much. He had been a little too confident after finding out about what happened with Zidian and had tried to unsheathe it a few days after he first regained consciousness, which had turned out to be a major mistake. The second Suibian moved out from its sheath by an inch, the pain that exploded in his lower dantian had taken him completely off guard. The next thing he knew, he was lying back on his bed where both Wen Qing and Jiang Cheng were yelling at him for being an idiot while Yanli had his hand clamped in his as she tried to soothe them. Lan Wangji had heard about the incident soon after and had been very upset.

“A-Xian?” Yanli’s voice snaps him out of his thoughts. “Whenever you’re ready.”

Wei Wuxian swallows, his fingers opening and closing over the hilt of the sword. He feels another hand on his and turns to meet Jiang Cheng’s eyes who nods at him. Wei Wuxian closes his eyes and takes a deep breath. There’s a loud *shing* as the blade of Suibian is finally

released. The energy from the sword flows through him, warming his body all the way down to the tip of his toes. Even when he had first unsheathed Suibian in Mo Xuanyu's body, it had not felt like this. Next to him, Zidian seems to hum softly on Jiang Cheng's wrist, purple energy glowing faintly.

"A-Xian." A soft voice calls to him and he opens his eyes again.

"Everyone..." Wei Wuxian trails off, unable to say any more as his eyes sting with happy tears. His sister comes close and gathers him in her arms. Wen Ning hesitates, but comes closer to them. Jiang Cheng and Wen Qing scoff, but join the circle.

"I can't wait to spar with you again. Just like old times." Jiang Cheng's voice is quiet, but enough for Wei Wuxian to hear it.

"Me too."

~

During the preparations, Wei Wuxian still hears gossip around about how Lan Wangji is a cutsleeve and would be marrying the head disciple of Yunmeng Jiang, a former demonic cultivator. Most of the people in Yunmeng had been accepting of it, having known Wei Wuxian for so many years. Others in Qinghe, Gusu and LanLing had not been as open-minded. The Nie disciples dared not talk bad about him whenever their sect leader or Huaisang was around, but Wei Wuxian has a feeling they still gossiped about it when his back had been turned. He didn't mind it, knowing that people would definitely talk about a cutsleeve wedding. Eventually the news would die down, just like every piece of gossip in the cultivation world.

"Wei-xiong, you're really going to love the gift I made for you!"

"Nie-xiong, don't spoil it!"

"But I'm giving it to you now!" Huaisang shoves a wrapped package into his arms. "Take it, take it!"

"Just put it over here with the other gifts," Wei Wuxian sighs. He leads his friend to the room where all of the gifts had been organized.

"Wah! Did Hanguang-jun really give you this many gifts?"

"Why are you surprised?"

"I'm not! I'm just jealous! Even San-ge doesn't give me these many gifts!"

"How can it be the same?" Wei Wuxian laughs. "These are wedding gifts." He goes quiet and looks around before leaning towards his friend.

"Are you really okay with him now? Truly?"

“Wei-xiong.” Huiasang’s expression turns serious. “Why do you ask me this?”

“Your resentment towards Meng Yao was strong. I was unsure if you could let go of this grudge.”

“If that was true, I would have chosen to have him killed in the very beginning. But I believe in second chances. And you did a good job, Wei-xiong. In this life, the grudges between me and him do not exist. My brother is alive and well, even more so thanks to Lady Wen’s treatment of him. Our main problem is gone as well.”

Main problem. He means Jin Guangshan.

“Anyways, Wei-xiong. Did Jiang-xiong tell you when his own wedding would be?”

“Let’s think about one wedding at the time, Nie-xiong,” Wei Wuxian laughs.

“Right right. Now, let me apply makeup for you. You promised you’d let me!” Before Wei Wuxian can protest, he’s dragged back to his own room by his friend by surprising force.

~

The procession from Yunmeng to Gusu is a long journey, but still as glamorous as any other wedding procession. A-Yuan had tried to sit in the pavilion with Wei Wuxian and after a lot of crying and pouting, they decide to allow it since in traditional weddings, the child *would* often sit with the groom. Wei Wuxian runs his hands over the delicate silk of his red and gold embroidered wedding robes.

His siblings had both contributed in how the robes would be tailored and designed, making sure it was glamorous and unique, the same way he and Jiang Cheng did while helping their sister with her own wedding robes. Instead of the standard gold pattern, his robes had patterns of clouds and lotus flowers. He had also worn a golden hairpiece and the jade rabbit hairpin that Lan Zhan had gifted to him. He wears several other jewelry pieces that his siblings had given him, among them a lotus hairpin. Wen Qing and Wen Ning had scrapped together money from their family’s farming and apothecary business to buy him a pair of butterfly earrings. Even A-Yuan had contributed to his outfit by tucking a lotus flower behind his ears.

When they finally reach Gusu, Wei Wuxian is escorted to the inner courtyard while everyone else is led to a private guest quarters, much different than the one they had stayed in during their studies.

“Zewu-jun, Master Lan.” Wei Wuxian greets them. Lan Qiren gives a slight shake of his head.

“You should call me ‘Shufu’ now, shouldn’t you?”

Wei Wuxian looks at him with a surprised and uncertain look but eventually nods.

“Shufu.” It feels strange saying it to his former teacher. It’s even stranger coming from someone who had condemned his use of resentful energy and would have wanted to punish

him. But once Lan Qiren had learned about his circumstances, Wei Wuxian had received unexpected support from not only him but many of the Lan elders as well. After all, they had played a role in accepting the marriage between him and Lan Wangji.

“You may call me ‘Xichen-ge’,” Lan Xichen tells him with a smile. “Get a good rest. Tomorrow is an important day. The hair combing ceremony will be conducted in the early morning.”

For once, Wei Wuxian goes to bed early that night. He doesn’t know if it was because of his excitement for the next day or just his general exhaustion from the journey to Gusu. As soon as he lays down on the bed, he falls asleep at once. It felt like only a minute had passed before he hears the knocking at the door. As he sits up, he sighs when he sees that it’s barely daybreak; he can still catch a glimpse of the moon behind a cloud in the sky. He allows the servants inside to help him to bathe and get dressed in his wedding robes. The bath water is infused with pomelo leaves, which is believed to ward off evil spirits. Soon after the Hair Combing Ceremony was finished, it’s finally time for the official ceremony. He’s led across the courtyard where Lan Wangji is waiting for him.

“Lan Zhan...”

“Wei Ying.”

“Are you ready?” Wei Wuxian swallows.

Why is he nervous? It’s not like this is the first time they’ve done this, yet...it felt so unfamiliar. Was it because everyone he loved was here?

“Mn.” Lan Wangji holds out his arm and Wei Wuxian takes it. Everyone is waiting for them in the main hall. A-Yuan waves excitedly from his grandmother’s arms, throwing out petals of lotus flowers over them as they pass by. His sister smiles at him with the sweetest smile, her husband at her side and MianMian on the other. Lan Qiren, Lan Xichen, and Jiang Cheng stand near the front, where a table with the tablets of Lan Wangji’s and Wei Wuxian’s parents sit before them. Glancing over at his brother, Wei Wuxian swears he can see the other’s eyes watering.

The ceremony begins with the three bows. Their first bow is to the heaven and earth. Their second bow is to their parents; together, they face their parents’ tablets and bow. Finally, the third bow is to one another.

After they perform their final bow, instead of lifting his head, Lan Wangji entwines his finger with his and pulls him in for a kiss under the veil Wei Wuxian leans into it, barely able to hear the noise coming from his brother and Lan Qiren. They would be going to the bridal chambers soon, but of course, Wei Wuxian knows his husband wouldn’t be able to wait.

Their walk to the bridal chamber is a little too fast-paced, but once Lan Wangji helps him to sit on the bed, he immediately unveils him.

“Ah, my husband is impatient, isn’t he?” Wei Wuxian smiles.

“Mn.”

“Are we drinking wine? Or will it be tea?” Wei Wuxian asks him as Lan Wangji brings over two cups filled with liquid.

“Only on a wedding will shufu make the exception. It is ceremonial wine,” Lan Wangji explains, holding out a cup to him.

“So the rules aren’t as rigid as they seem to be, huh?” Wei Wuxian laughs, taking the cup. Lan Wangji crosses arms with him and Wei Wuxian tilts the cup into his mouth. Wei Wuxian waits, watching Lan Wangji’s eye droop before he slumps forward against his chest.

“Aiya, Lan Zhan. It was such a small cup yet you are still like this.” Wei Wuxian keeps him there in his lap for a while, tracing a finger along his face, neck and hair. Then he finally lays him back down onto the bed. Wei Wuxian removes his jewelry pieces, leaving the bunny hairpin in here before laying down next to him.

He’s only closed his eyes for a while when he wakes up to something being tied around his wrists.

“Lan Zhan?” Wei Wuxian sits up, blinking away sleep and looks down at his wrist to see his husband’s head ribbon!

“Lan Zhan, you’re giving me your ribbon again?” Wei Wuxian holds it up and Lan Wangji blinks at him with half-closed eyes before nodding.

“It is tradition to tie knots on one another. To signify a united a heart.”

“In that case...” Wei Wuxian removes his red ribbon from his hair and takes hold of his husband’s wrist. “I should do it too, shouldn’t I?”

“Wei Ying.” Lan Wangji’s face and ears turn pink as Wei Wuxian finishes the knot. “Wei Ying, you have your own ribbon as well.”

Wei Wuxian freezes and Lan Wangji produces a box from under the pillow.

“I requested one. Shufu allowed it.”

“But...” Wei Wuxian begins. Lan Wangji doesn’t let him finish as he uncovers the box and takes the ribbon out. Wei Wuxian notices that the ribbon is embroidered with lotuses as well as clouds and the color of the ribbon is a more purple-ish blue color than the normal pale blue.

“Turn around.”

Wei Wuxian turns and allows his husband to tie the ribbon around his forehead. Then finally, Lan Wangji flips him onto his back in one smooth motion and leans in. Wei Wuxian closes his eyes as their lips collide, sinking into each other. He leans further into the kiss as his husband runs his hands down his waist. He smiles softly in content.

“Lan Zhan, I love you.”

“Love Wei Ying too.”

And the night continues.

Nine months later...

The dinner banquet that night for Jin Ling’s one month celebration only had close family members and friends. Yanli and Jin Zixuan had decided to have their own celebration first before having a bigger celebration with the other four clans.

“Jiang Cheng! Let me hold him, it’s my turn!” Wei Wuxian reaches over for the infant in his brother’s arms but Jiang Cheng casually steps to one side.

“Boys, let’s not argue okay? Who’s going to be responsible if A-Ling starts crying? He’s not going anywhere. You will have your turn if you are patient.”

Jiang Cheng passes over Jin Ling eventually and Wei Wuxian holds him carefully while his husband watches from his side, a soft expression on his face.

“Lan Zhan, we should have more,” Wei Wuxian mutters under his breath. “Let Jiang Cheng have a few more nephews or nieces and have them keep him company in Lotus Pier.”

“Have more? You mean adopt?” Jiang Cheng glances over him and Wei Wuxian looks at him with a toothy grin.

“Birth more like I did with A-Yuan of course!”

“ *Wei Wuxian!* ”

“A-Ling will have more cousins too!”

“Being married didn’t make you any more mature, did it?” Wen Qing snorts.

“It made *you* more harsh,” Wei Wuxian whines in response, but shifts his gaze away as Wen Qing’s glare sharpens.

“Well..having Jiang-xiong as a husband would do that, wouldn’t it?” Huaisang laughs. “No offense to Madam Wen, of course.”

“Nie Huaisang, you be quiet!” Jiang Cheng practically growls at him. Jiang Cheng and Wen Qing had only been married a month ago, but Wei Wuxian had felt a shift in Lotus Pier after Wen Qing became lady of Lotus Pier. Although, it had given him sense of almost deja-vu, it had not been a bad change. Wen Qing always made sure the disciples were never too exhausted by Jiang Cheng’s strict training, ordering them to take water breaks and forcing the training to end early on days that were too hot. Jiang Cheng had not protested.

“A-Yuan’s turn!” Wei Wuxian feels a tug at his robes, distracting him from their bickering.

“Okay, A-Yuan can hold him.” Yanli smiles. She crouches down and carefully passes the baby into the other child’s arm. “Hold him near the head, okay?”

“Mn!”

Jin Ling coos loudly as he’s held in A-Yuan’s arms, his eyes wide and curious.

“No, but I’m serious,” Wei Wuxian continues. “Why don’t we adopt more, Lan Zhan?”

“We have some orphans from Meishan Yu here too,” Jiang Cheng says, clearing his throat. “They’re children of distant relatives. Wen Qing and I...” He glances over at his wife. “We were thinking about it as well.”

“You’re going to adopt, Jiejie?” Wen Ning asks with a surprised expression on his face.

“We have orphans from Qishan too, A-Ning. Either way...it will extend our family,” Wen Qing says with a smile. “And the Wens...we will restore the reputation of our surname and the Jiangs, our clan will grow stronger than ever with the alliances we’ve made.”

“To family.” Jiang Cheng’s voice rings out over the room. Everyone stands with their cup. There are so many faces Wei Wuxian didn’t think he would see at the banquet hall: some are new faces, others are faces of those he thought he’d lost forever, and then others he’d cherished for many many years.

“To family,” Wei Wuxian echoes with a beaming smile. He looks over at Jiang Cheng who gives him a small smile back, his face full of unspoken emotions.

We did it. Everything will be okay now.

The end

Bonus scenes down below :)))

Five years later...

Wei Wuxian holds true to his promise of adopting more children; war orphans from all four regions. Either way, they all adopted the surname ‘Wei’ after the adoptions became official. Little Wei Zhu, Wei Qi, and Wei Xiang only extend Jiang Cheng’s family further. Unfortunately for Jiang Cheng, that also means the chances of getting tackled by one of his adopted nephews or nieces are higher.

“Lan Sizhui, Jin Rulan,” Jiang Cheng speaks as sternly as possible. “I know you’re there.”

“But Uncle, we’re just trying to have fun!” Jin Ling whines as he comes out from behind his hiding space. Sizhui follows close behind, his head ducked.

“You’re supposed to be training.” Jiang Cheng shakes his head at him. “A-Yuan, as the older one here, please set a good example.”

“Of course, Uncle.” Sizhui bows politely, but Jiang Cheng doesn’t miss the mischievous glint in his eyes. “Jin Ling, let’s go train for a while longer! Then we can join Zizhen and Jingyi on the lake!”

“Okay!”

“Let’s have a competition then?”

“Yeah!” Jin Ling’s eyes light up with excitement and he runs ahead. “I’ll get there first!”

“Hey, not fair!” Sizhui rushes after him.

“Look at the two of them. Don’t they remind you of us?” Wei Wuxian appears at his side, resting his elbows on Jiang Cheng’s shoulders.

“You’re not comparing yourself to Sizhui, are you? He’s polite and well-mannered.”

“Hey! My manners have gotten better since I started living in Gusu!” Wei Wuxian protests.

“Yet your cooking skills haven’t changed one bit despite being subjected to Gusu’s bland food.”

“You really think Lan Zhan will let me eat bland food?” Wei Wuxian sticks his tongue out.

“Whatever. Where are the other kids?”

“They’re with Wen Ning on the lake picking lotus pods. What about A-Yan? Is she with Qing-jie again?”

“She always is. She always insists on being with A-Qing and never wants to train with a sword.” Jiang Cheng huffs. “But inheriting Wen Qing’s medical skills will be a valuable asset to the clan as well.”

“What about LiFeng? Doesn’t she love training with you?”

LiFeng and LiPing were both from Meishan Yu, the children of Jiang Cheng’s mother’s distant cousin that had been orphaned after the war.

“She’s feisty and stubborn.” Jiang Cheng replies. “But she works hard, just like her brother. She’s already been trained with Meishan Yu sword forms so adapting to our clan’s hasn’t been difficult.”

“That’s because she has a good mentor.” Wei Wuxian elbows him softly. “Now, are we going to stand around and chat or are we going to spar?”

Jiang Cheng smirks at him as he unsheathes Sandu, waiting for Wei Wuxian to unsheathe Suibian first before engaging into the fight.

Over the sound of clashing blades, there’s the sound of laughter of children, the soft melody of a guqin, and the croaking of frogs. The sounds of home.

Chapter End Notes

WEEEE, it's finally done. For some reason, the last chapter is always the most difficult to write, even though I KNEW what I had to write. It must have been because I almost didn't want the story to be finished. But now it's finally done! I can't believe I've been working on this fic for over a year. Thank you to all my readers for being so patient with me through any delays or long periods of me not posting. Thank you especially for reading all the way to the end and going on this journey with me.

I will now try and get my other shorter fics down and then continue my other time-travel full-length fic. One down...many to go LOL

As always, leave a comment below!

End Notes

Come join the DCC server! I am one of the admins there (Loki Doki) Many many mdzs fans here along with other fans of other BL fandoms: TGCF, SVSS, Word of honor,

[DCC server](#)

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!